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MONTÉ THE MUTINEER



OR, THE BRANDED BRIG.

A Companion Story to "The Doomed
Whaler," and "The Fleet Scourge."

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEAUTIFUL CONVICT.

A STRANGE, sad sight it was for man's eyes to
fall upon—a woman in a prison cell.

Sad indeed is it to behold a man caged like a
wild beast for crime against his fellow-men; but
for a woman it looks worse than terrible, it ap-
pears cruel, uncanny.

And this woman was young, beautiful and
accused of murder.

The cell was grim in spite of efforts made by
the kind jailer and his wife to made it appear
comfortable at least.

A small window looked out upon a seaport
town, with the blue waters of the harbor stretch-
ing away toward the ocean beyond.

A cot with snow-white spread and pillow, a
table on which were writing materials a few

THE WHITE-HAIRED HERMIT OF THE ISLE DROPPED UPON HIS KNEES ON THE ROCK, AND
RAISED HIS HANDS IN SUPPLICATION TO HEAVEN

books and a lamp, a guitar hanging upon the wall, with a rocking-chair, work-basket and rag carpet comprised the furniture of the room.

The occupant stood at the window, the sill of which was just high enough for her to rest her elbows upon, and her hands were under her chin, as she gazed out upon the scene.

Her position was one of natural grace, and her form perfect, the face being one that would have caught the eye of an artist.

She wore a black, close-fitting dress, relieved of its somberness by a white lace kerchief around the neck.

Upon one hand was a wedding ring, and another gold band in which was a single gem, a large and brilliant ruby.

Her face was beautiful, for her eyes were large, dark-blue and shaded by long lashes, while her hair was of a bronze hue that shone with golden luster as the sunlight fell upon it.

A face of wondrous beauty, but stamped indelibly with a sadness that was touching.

Suddenly a step was heard in the corridor, and there came a rap at the door, which almost immediately opened and the matron of the jail said:

"A gentleman to see you on business, Mrs. Rutledge."

A look of surprise crossed the beautiful face, but the fair convict said:

"Admit him."

Then into the room stepped a man whose appearance was striking.

He was under thirty, well-formed and dressed in the height of fashion, while he wore considerable jewelry, which gave him the appearance of a sport.

His face was strongly marked, fine-looking, and yet would hardly stand close study, if one was searching for noble qualities in the man.

"Captain Vail, this is an interview I neither expected or desire," said the beautiful convict, haughtily.

The man's face flushed, but he said in a tone of gentleness:

"I called, Lola, to—"

"Pray remember, sir, that my name was not given up with my husband's life. I am still Mrs. Rutledge, Captain Vail."

"Pardon me, if I addressed you by the old name I knew you by, when, I may say, we were children together; but I came here, Mrs. Rutledge, to see you, now that the trial has gone against you, and you are—"

"Don't hesitate, sir—say it—now that I am to be hanged," and the woman spoke in an unmoved manner.

"Well, yes, for I fear there is no hope for you."

"I know there is none, nor did I expect it when my husband in dying said to the constables when asked who was his slayer:

"She can tell you," meaning me.

"I am guilty, so says the Law, and I submit to the alternative—the gallows!"

"It is fearful to hear you talk so, and I have come to tell you that it must not be—that I will save you."

"You?" there was almost scorn in the word.

"Yes."

"How can you save me, Ezra Vail?"

"I can aid you to escape, and—"

"Ah! and my escape but the further would prove my guilt."

"You are guilty now—I mean in the eyes of the Law; and if you could escape, you could go far away from here with your children, and—"

"My children! my God! my poor little children!"

The calmness of the woman was broken, for the man had touched the mother's heart in speaking of her children.

"Yes, you could go far away, and you are rich, very rich, for your husband's will left you everything, and he possessed a vast fortune."

"I could arrange to get rid of your property, for gold, and you could be most happy in a foreign land—"

"Most happy? I could be happy, I the murderer, the slayer of the father of my children, as your just laws have proven?"

"Do you gauge my conscience by your own, Ezra Vail?"

The words were cutting in the extreme, and the man winced under them.

But suddenly she said:

"You will aid my escape, transfer my property into gold for me, and let me fly far away from here, you say?"

"Yes, I can do so."

"To escape from these stone walls is no easy matter, Captain Vail."

"Still I can arrange it, yes, and protect your flight wholly."

"And your price?"

"What do you mean?"

"You set a price upon your services of course?"

Again his face flushed, and he said:

"You know that I always loved you, and that, but for Mark Mountjoy, I could have won you—"

"Never! you never even held my regard, Ezra Vail, for I read you too well."

"And yet you married a man three times your own age?"

"True, I sold myself to him for gold to save my father in his old age from financial ruin."

"I told him that there was one I loved, Mark Mountjoy, one I had loved when I was but a wee girl of eight, and never ceased to love, in spite of his wild pranks, his reckless career that broke his old parents' hearts."

"He was not bad, but thoughtless, reckless, and I loved him as he did me."

"I told Peter Rutledge this, and he took me without my heart; he said himself that he bought me, and that some day I should love him, and so he had a beautiful miniature made of me with a strange device upon it—a diamond hand clasping one of pearls, with the French words in rubies, *Le jour viendra*."

"It was prophetic, for he said it was a rich man's, as represented by the diamonds, clasping a young and pure girl's, as represented by the pearls, and the words meant that *the day would come* when I should love him."

"Poor old Peter Rutledge—he had that locket about his neck when he was killed, and *the day did come* for him, as the words in rubies expressed it."

"Now you know that I never loved other than Mark Mountjoy."

"And yet, as Peter Rutledge took you in faith, so will I, Lola. Be my wife; pledge yourself to become such, and I will aid you to escape from here, so help me Heaven do I pledge you my word!"

He stepped toward her as though to clasp her hand, but shrunk back as he caught the look upon her face.

"You dare to ask me to become your wife, I a condemned murderess, awaiting execution on the gallows for having taken my husband's life?"

"Go! Ezra Vail, or I will kill you!" and she drew from her bosom a Spanish dirk and advanced toward him.

With a cry of terror the man sprung toward the door, and, rapping loudly upon it, was released from his peril by the surprised jailer who had heard his call to be let out, and in his ears rung the mocking laugh of the beautiful convict.

CHAPTER II.

THE VAILED VISITOR.

THE condemned woman had not been long alone, after the visit of Captain Ezra Vail, when the jailer's wife appeared and said:

"A lady to see you, Mrs. Rutledge."

"I will see no one, Mrs. Carter, for I wish to be left in peace the few days I yet have to live."

"I am very sorry Captain Vail worried you, m'am; but I hoped he would get them to change your sentence, for he is so rich, and has so much influence."

"No, I could not accept—not even life itself at his hands."

"You won't see the lady then, m'am?"

"No, I wish to see no one from this day, excepting yourself and your kind husband, Mrs. Carter."

The matron retired, but soon returned with the remark:

"She says she must see you, m'am; but she would not give her name, and she is dressed in deep mourning and is heavily veiled."

"I will not see her," was the reply, so sternly uttered that Mrs. Carter wondered how such beautiful lips could utter the words thus.

Again she retired, but to reappear for the third time.

"She sent you this ring, m'am, and said you would see her when you saw that."

As she spoke Mrs. Carter handed to Lola Rutledge a ring the counterpart of the one she had on her hand, excepting that a pearl was the gem set in it in place of a ruby.

As she took it the hand trembled, the face turned deadly pale and she sunk into a chair.

Then she said, as Mrs. Carter sprung toward her:

"Yes, I will see her, and dear, good Mrs. Carter, will you not see that no one comes near us, or approaches along the corridor while she is here, and let her remain as long as she will?"

"Yes, honey, I'll do it, so don't look so appealing, as it breaks my heart, used as I am to scenes of other folks' misery."

"I'll let her stay until closing time to-night, if you wish it, and there shall not a soul come along the corridor either, for I will lock the door at the end of it."

"I'll fetch her at once, m'am, only don't look so white and wretched, for you never looked even moved when they sentenced you to death."

"This is more than that sentence—to face what now I have to do," was the low response, and Mrs. Carter left the cell.

Springing to her feet the lonely woman approached the mirror that hung upon the wall over the washstand, smoothed her hair and put on a cheerful face—it was like a smile on the face of a corpse.

Then the door opened and the veiled visitor entered.

Mrs. Carter quickly closed the door, and Lola Rutledge stood like a statue over by the window.

But, with a bound the veiled visitor sprung

—The day will come.—THE AUTHOR.

toward her and threw her arms about her, while she cried in a voice quivering with emotion:

"May God have mercy upon you, my poor, poor sister."

"For my crime, or the fate I must suffer, Ethel?" asked the condemned woman.

"Lola! do you think for one moment I believe you guilty?" was the reproachful response.

"Heaven bless you for those words, Ethel," and the voice quivered.

"No! no! I know that you are innocent."

"And yet you deserted me, Ethel; left me to my fate, to a just judge and jury, and the mercy of glib-tongued lawyers, with not a soul to aid me, to give me comfort under the curse I bore?"

"Lola! hear me, for your words are unkind to me."

"My husband, Captain Monte, was away on a cruise in his brig after pirates, and word came to me that you had killed your husband, that he had accused you of it with his dying lips."

"No, he did not accuse me, but his words were so taken."

"It was a dark, stormy night, and my husband had a visitor— Oh, God! must I go over that scene again?"

For a moment she was unnerved, but by an effort of her iron will that had won the admiration of all at her trial, if not their pity, she was instantly calm again and continued:

"I heard a cry for help, and running to my husband's library, I beheld him struggling with the—the—visitor I had heard him admit some time before—nay, more, I saw him fall with his death-wound, inflicted with this knife—see, is it not a beautiful toy?" and she handed the murderous weapon to her sister, who put it away, with a shudder.

"I have kept it, you see, Ethel, because it was— Well, never mind, that is my secret, and must go to the grave with me."

"The visitor fled, and in came a couple of constables who were passing and heard my husband's cries, and as I held the blood-stained knife, and his words were, 'She can tell who my murderer was,' I was arrested, tried, found guilty, and am to hang just two weeks from today."

She spoke with a calmness that appalled her sister, who, after an effort at self-control, said:

"I believe you guiltless, Lola, and I know how you have suffered, my poor child."

"You always loved poor wayward, reckless Mark Mountjoy, and offered yourself for sale to save father and mother from poverty in their old age."

"I have heard of your wretched existence, for rumor had it that your old husband kept you caged up in an old rookery and was as jealous as a Turk of you, and what you suffered went against you on the trial, as people thought you had grown revengeful, and more, as Peter Rutledge had made his will, leaving you every dollar of his fortune."

"But let me prove to you, my dear sister, that I did not intentionally desert you."

"Captain Monte was away, as I told you, when word came to me of your—your—misfortune."

"It caused me to swoon away, and brought on brain-fever, from which I have just recovered, and am now only able to come to you by the greatest exertion."

"My husband returned two days ago, but was at once ordered to sea again, but told me to come to you the moment I could, with his love, his sympathy, and to save you if it could be done, and if not to comfort you in your last hours, and to take your children as our own."

A cry like a gasp broke from the lips of Lola Rutledge, and for a moment she seemed as though she was about to break down.

But again she controlled herself and said:

"Ethel, from my inmost soul I thank you, and I beg you to forgive me for all my cruel thoughts of you and of Captain Monte."

"But I understand all now, and I can die happy, even though the Law strangles me to death, when I know that my children are to you and to Roland Monte as your children."

"Here, do you see this sealed package?"

"Well, it is my confession, and for my children."

"I had them spirited away by their faithful nurse, when I was arrested, and no one knows where they are."

"They must never know that their mother was hanged, hanged for the murder of their father."

"You have no children, and you have lived far from here, so if you get your husband to be ordered to another station, no one will know that they are not your own, and as you and Roland believe me innocent, my alleged crime will not stain their young lives in your eyes."

"Their property I will have in such a way that when they are of age they can claim it, and all will have been forgotten then, and no one will suspect them of having been the heirs of Lola Rutledge, the murderess."

"This confession must be kept with my will, in the hands of my two executors, you and your husband, and to be given to my son when he comes of age."

"If he chooses to let his sister know it, he may; but if not it will be better so, perhaps, and if you care to know then my story, so be it."

"But, remember, place my property, as though your own, into other hands, so that no one may suspect, or my children will bear the stain of their mother's ignominious death."

"Let the world believe that you and Captain Monte cast me off utterly for my crime, and the children will then be as your own and take your name."

"Do you understand all I have said to you, my noble sister?"

"I do, everything, and all shall be as you say."

"If I cannot save you, Lola, cannot protect your memory, I can at least keep the ignominy of your death from being borne by your children—my children now, my sister."

"And you pledge me this?"

"Before God I do!" was the solemn response, and the black veil was thrown back, as the hand was upraised, revealing a face startlingly like that of the beautiful convict, for they were twin sisters.

"And do you answer for Roland Monte?"

"With my honor and life, for he will never betray the trust, or your secret."

"God grant it! Now I can go to the gallows undaunted," and Lola Rutledge's whole mien at once changed while the smile that came upon her face softened the sternness that had dwelt there since the hour of the accusation of murder against her.

"But, my sister, is there no chance for you to effect your escape?" suddenly asked Ethel Monte, in an excited whisper.

"Yes, I was offered my freedom an hour ago by Ezra Vail."

"What! your old lover who became a rich owner of whaling ships?"

"Yes."

"He married, I believe, and is a widower with one child, a son?"

"Yes."

"And he offered to aid you to escape, Lola?"

"He did."

"Thank Heaven there is hope."

"No, I cast the tempting cup from my lips, for he wanted terms."

"Terms?"

"Yes, that I should become his wife—Curses upon him! I sent him cowering out of that door in fear of his craven life," and Lola Rutledge sprung to her feet in her excitement, while her sister dropped her head with a moan and the low uttered words:

"God have mercy upon you! Lola, you are doomed!"

CHAPTER III.

THE SAILOR HERMITS.

UPON an island but a short distance from Swan Island, on the coast of Maine, still stand the ruins of what was once a stone cabin, and in the present day the summer visitors from Mount Desert who have cruised that far in their yachting excursions know nothing of the strange history connected with that little home.

There are some graves near it, and a legend says that an old hermit once dwelt there who was a wrecker, and that there were buried many an unfortunate shipwrecked man.

One night, something over four-score years ago, a ship's boat had gone ashore there, but fortunately had reached an inlet where it was safe and had not been dashed to pieces.

There were dead men in the boat, and two who were dying, with two more who had stood the starvation and exposure of days better than had the others.

These two did all in their power for their dying comrades, but it was of no avail, for ere a day passed they alone remained of the crew.

Amid a group of cedars they were buried, and the survivors began to recuperate under a rest, and from getting food, for there was plenty of game on the island.

After a stay of several weeks they one day took from their boat an iron strong box, and hunting for a secure hiding-place along the rocks, buried it there, making it appear as one of the other graves.

Then the little boat put away from the island, shaping her course toward the mainland and disappeared in the distance.

And for more than two years the island remained in its solitude and desolation.

Then, one pleasant afternoon a small shallop came in sight and skirmishing rapidly over the waters under the light breeze, headed in for the island, through a break in the surrounding surf.

As though familiar with the spot the helmsman steered toward a little land-locked basin, hardly half an acre in size, where the shipwrecked crew of the boat found refuge two years before.

The shallop was a pretty craft, graceful, stanch and with everything shipshape about her.

She was some twenty tons burden, and yet her helmsman handled her with perfect ease, and he was the only one visible upon her decks except a small child, a boy of three dressed in a sailor suit.

The shallop was steered into the basin and glided gently alongside of a rocky shelf that served as a natural wharf.

"Here we are, Malcolm, at home," said the helmsman, and he sprung ashore and made the shallop fast.

He was a man of fine physique, with a stern face, stamped with boldness and recklessness, a man who had lived two-score years.

That he was a sailor there was no doubt, but withal there was a look of intelligence and refinement about him that showed he was no ordinary person.

Making his boat fast, he neatly furled the sails, and opening the fore hatches began to put certain things on shore.

Then telling the little boy to await him there, he walked up into the island and after a short search said:

"Here is the very spot—it commands a view of the sea, and these rocks and cedars protect it from the east and north winds, while this brook is right at hand."

"I will pitch my tent here."

And by his "tent" he meant his cabin, for he lost no time in going to work, and with tools brought with him he cut out rocks and began to build.

Months passed away, and the chill winds of November were sweeping the island ere the little home was finished; but it was at last completed, and a snug retreat it was, for the sailor had brought doors and windows with him, and all else to make life endurable there.

He had his books for the long winter evenings, and the coop of chickens had been set loose upon the island, with a dog and cat, and the shallop had seemed to hold an inexhaustible store of everything that was needed for the comfort of one who had hidden himself and little boy away on that desolate island.

There were game and fish in abundance, and the little companion of the sailor soon became an expert in fishing, while he roamed the island at will, and young as he was, did much to help the stern man, whose face always softened when he addressed the wee lad.

Thus twelve years passed away to the lone dwellers on the island, with only four runs away each year in the shallop, to Portland, Bath, or Belfast, Maine, for stores, and after half a dozen years had passed, the voyage had been extended to Portsmouth, and even as far as Boston.

Of course on each trip the lad had gone, and as he grew in years he became an expert assistant to the master of the shallop who seemed anxious to make of him a thorough sailor.

He had also, possessing a superior education himself, taught the lad from the books they had, and with an apt mind for study it would have puzzled many a college youth to prove himself the superior of the hermit youth of the island.

One afternoon, twelve years after the coming to the island of this strange pair, the sailor stood upon a rock overhanging the sea gazing out over the tempest-swept waters.

The clouds were dark and threatening violence, and the sea, lashed into fury by a gale of a couple of days' duration, were hurling tremendous breakers upon the island, that fairly shook it to its foundation.

In the years that had passed since he had landed there one pleasant spring afternoon, with a wee child his only comrade, the sailor had changed much.

His dark hair had grown long, until it fell in many waves upon his shoulders, while then beardless, he now wore a beard that reached to his belt and matched his hair in whiteness, giving him a patriarchal look.

His attire was that of a sailor, and his face was darkly bronzed while his eyes were very bright; but there was a look about him as though he was a sufferer from some dread disease.

"I do hope the boy has not started in this gale; but he said he would come to-day, and it would be just like his daring spirit to set sail even in a tempest."

"My eyes are not what they once were, so I cannot see beyond a league—I must get my glass."

He walked back toward the cabin, a hundred yards away, with a slow step, and soon returned with his glass, with which he swept the horizon of the wildly raving waters.

It was nearing night, and the clouds were darkening still more, the sea growing wilder, and the winds increasing with a fury that nearly blew him from the rocks.

Suddenly he uttered a cry, half of joy, half of alarm, and then followed the words:

"It is the shallop! but God have mercy! the boy, daring as he is, can never run into the basin in this mad storm."

"Oh, Heaven! do not destroy his young life upon the very threshold of manhood!" and the white-haired Hermit of the Isle dropped upon his knees on the rock, and raised his hands in supplication to Heaven, as he beheld out upon the tempest-swept waters the small sloop struggling toward a haven, and upon whose deck he knew there was but one human being—a mere boy.

CHAPTER IV.

FIGHTING DEATH.

HAVING given utterance to the supplication for the safety of the boy, the white-haired man stood with straining eyes to watch his course.

The craft he gazed upon was the same little shallop which a dozen years ago had brought the strange pair, an old man and a child, to the island.

It had been well kept, repaired when needed, and with a new suit of sails, was as good as ever.

A week before the lad had started in her to Portland, for stores and medicines for the old man, who was ill.

But though on former occasions the two had always gone together, the sailor knew that the boy was fully capable of handling the shallop in all weathers, so had allowed him to go alone.

Now he saw that the lad, true to his word, had left Portland when he said he would, and was in sight of his home, with a fierce storm raging and growing more furious every moment.

"The equinoctial storm has come sooner than I thought it would this year—I had not bargained for such wild weather as this when I let him go alone."

"Oh! if he should be lost, then the past years of my life are but as naught."

"I would die here alone, and no one would ever know, none of those red-handed devils that took his life would ever be made to feel, and the boy would not become the avenger that he must be."

"No! no! no! He must not, shall not die."

"Hail night is coming on and it will be black as ink, and I stand here like a fool, when I may save the boy—yes, I may save him!"

He fairly shrieked the last words and at once, with a speed that one would not expect from one of his seeming years, ran back to his cabin.

Soon he returned with a large armful of pine wood, and quickly he lighted a fire upon the point of rocks, that blazed up fiercely in the gathering gloom.

Throwing some more wood on, that it should not die out, he again sought the cabin, and with another armful of pine knots fairly ran along the ridge toward another cliff a couple of hundred yards away, and which was just over the little basin where the shallop found a harborage when at the island.

Here he built another fire, and its bright rays went forth over the black waters.

"Now, if he steers for the lightning-riven pine, which these fires reveal, he is safe—if he swerves the length of his boat he is doomed," said the Sailor Hermit impressively.

Meanwhile, the night had come on black as ink, and the howling of the winds and thunder of the surf upon the rocky shore of the island was appalling.

With the darkness the tempest increased, and out upon the mad waters was the little shallop.

She was reefed down, with her jib reduced to the smallest size, her topmast housed and her mainsail set to one-fifth its full expanse.

The hatches were battened down, the companionway to the cabin closed, and crouching in the cockpit, his eyes fastened upon the two fires gleaming out from the island, was the lad whose nerve and skill guided the destiny of the little craft.

The man on the island hastened from fire to fire, to build them up, so that their bright rays should not fail the lone boy mariner.

He was taxing his strength beyond all endurance, but he heeded it not, for he sought to save the lad.

If one of those lights failed, the end was certain, and with them success was not assured.

So he struggled on, hastening from fire to fire, and piling on the pine knots, of which he had a large supply piled up at the cabin in preparation for the coming winter.

The lad himself had put them there, and now his work was bringing forth valuable results to himself.

Now and then the old man would hesitate between the two fires, at the base of a massive pine, the top of which had been riven by lightning, and he would sweep the wild waste of waters with his glass.

"My God! he has gone down!"

"I was a fool to dream any small craft could live on a night like this—ha! ha! ha! he has not gone down! he lives! he lives! the shallop comes bravely on! bravo! bravo! that boy is a wonder! Ahoy, ahoy! oh—"

He did not finish the words, which came in a shriek of commingled joy and triumph from his lips, for he staggered backward, clutched at the overhanging branches of a small tree and sunk to the ground.

His lips were stained with blood, and a steady stream trickled from his mouth.

But he started up once more as he heard from the very depths below him:

"Ahoy! ahoy the cliff!"

The hail was in a clear, ringing voice, in answer to his own, and the old sailor strove to reply, but was unable and sunk back upon the rocky path.

And not a hundred yards from where he lay now appeared the shallop.

She had passed in through the break in the reef, guided by the two fires, which now shone down upon her decks brightly, revealing the crouching form of the lad, as he took off his tarpaulin and waved it in triumph around his

head, while a cheer broke from his lips at the victory he had won over death.

Like a frightened whale the little shallop was driving along, being low in the waters, reeling, staggering, plunging, her decks swept by the waves, but held unerringly on until she darted out of the firelight into the darkness of the rock-sheltered basin and was safe.

In boyish delight there came from the lips of the daring helmsman a ringing cheer; but no answer was heard from the cliffs overhead.

He had soon the fight against death with the odds in favor of the mighty destroyer, and as his little craft glided into quiet water he ran her into the mouth of a small creek, sprung ashore and hastened up the path toward the cabin to come suddenly upon the form of the old sailor obstructing the way.

CHAPTER V.

THE HERMIT'S STORY.

WITH an exclamation of alarm, and a feeling of dread at his heart, which his great danger in running the gantlet of the reefs into the basin had not caused him to feel, the young sailor raised the form of the old man in his arms and bore him toward the cabin.

He showed a strength that was remarkable, and yet he seemed to think little of his load.

Arriving at the cabin he placed the limp form upon the bed, and as a ship's lantern revealed all distinctly he started as he beheld the red stain upon the white beard and clothing.

"He is not dead, thank Heaven! but he has had another hemorrhage, and this seems to be the most severe of all," cried the youth, and he sprung to the cupboard and taking out a bottle and cup, gave the man a drink of brandy, fairly forcing it between his lips.

The effect was soon evident, for the eyes opened, a flush came into the pale face, and the breath at first labored soon became natural.

"It is you, my boy! I feared for you; but you are here?"

"Yes, Father Will, I am here, safe and sound; but I am sorry to find you ill again."

"It was another hemorrhage."

"Yes; but I have your medicine with me, and you'll soon build up again."

"No, Malcolm, the struggle is coming to an end, for I feel it."

"The winter is coming on and it will soon be over with me."

"I had hoped to live to see you reach man's estate; but though a boy in years this night showed that you were a man indeed, for never did I see a bolder, braver struggle than you made."

"I could not have run that gantlet myself."

"Your lights saved me, Father Will, for it was so black I could not see the island until the fires blazed up."

"With them, as long as the shallop could stand it, the run was easy."

"You make light of it, my boy; but I know what your nerve and skill accomplished."

"There, Father Will, you must not talk, but let me make you comfortable and after a dose of your medicine you will go to sleep and awake all right in the morning."

The old man yielded and an hour after he sunk into a comfortable sleep, while the youth sat at the table near reading.

He was very tired, but did not wish yet to retire, as he seemed to feel that his companion was in a critical condition.

As he sat there the lamp swinging over the table cast its light full upon him.

His form was not yet filled out, but there was the indication that he would make a powerful man.

His shoulders were broad, his chest full and his appearance that of an athlete, while his face was striking in its look of fearlessness, conscious power in himself and intelligence.

It was a face unstamped by sorrow or care, and the light in his eyes and expression about his mouth was joyous and full of mischief.

For awhile the old man slept peacefully, and the youth sat reading his book, while the winds howled savagely without and the whistling through the pines that surrounded the stone cabin, sounded like the wailing of departed spirits.

Then the old man became restless, and at last opened his eyes.

"Malcolm?"

"Yes, Father Will."

"I feel that I am growing worse."

"I am feverish, and it is not right for me to put off longer a duty I have to perform."

"To-morrow you will feel better."

"There may be no to-morrow to me, Malcolm."

"Come, draw your chair up near me and listen to what I have to say."

"I fear you will only excite yourself by talking, and bring on another hemorrhage."

"I cannot help it, for I must talk, I must tell you of yourself."

The boy started, his face flushed.

At last he was going to learn who and what he was.

He had often longed to ask, to know about himself, but the one whom he loved as though he was his father, was wont to say:

"Some day, my son, when you are older, and can understand."

The time had now come, and he was to know all.

"Draw near, for I wish to talk in a low tone, and I do not want my strength to fail me."

The lad gave him a glass of brandy and drew his chair up to the side of the cot.

"I never taught you to believe you were my child, Malcolm, so brought you up to call me Father Will."

"By no other name have you known me, and I believe you only know yourself as Malcolm."

"That is all, father, and when in port I have been asked what my other name was, I have only been able to answer that one name was enough for me."

"Your name is Malcolm Meredith Mountjoy, my son, and your father was a creature of cruel circumstances, as you shall know."

"To begin with, my name is William Wildermere Rutledge; but my father was a man so mean that he ill-treated my poor mother, and after her death of a broken heart, he drove me from his home, and so I dropped my last name, and have been known as Will Wildermere."

"For the life I led my father was responsible, for had he been kind to me, given me the advantages he should have, I would have been a different man, and not now be dying here on this lone island, a fugitive, a hermit, with you alone by my side."

"But enough of myself, for I went wrong, and I met your father, to whom I owed a debt I could never repay, for I owed him my life."

"Your father, Mark Mountjoy was his name, was well born, the son of a worthy clergyman."

"But he was full of mischief, and his pranks made the little town where he lived too hot for him, so he ran off and went to sea, and soon, by gallant acts, became a midshipman."

"But he could not keep out of mischief, lost his berth by dismissal, and again won it back by some daring act, to be again dismissed."

"He was not wicked, but had an overflow of spirits that got him continually into hot water and trouble."

"Then he disappeared for a long time, to return as master and owner of a fine schooner."

"But his parents were dead, and a maiden whom he had always loved since they were school-children together, had sold herself to a rich old miser, to save her father from financial ruin."

"That old miser, let me here tell you was Peter Rutledge, my father."

"Your father was dealt a severe blow by the death of his parents and loss of his sweetheart, so put to sea again, after paying for a fine monument to be erected over his father and mother."

"His vessel was taken by a pirate, and for a long time he was forced to serve as an officer on the freebooter craft."

"While in New Orleans he saved a beautiful maiden, the daughter of a wealthy planter, from being kidnapped, and some time after at sea his vessel captured a brig on which was this very girl."

"Her name was Alma Shields, and she was your mother."

"Her father had lost his fortune and committed suicide, and she was on her way to an old relative in New England."

"This second meeting with the beautiful girl brought about a reformation in your father, and he followed the lady to New England, made her his wife, and they found a home in Salem, a port which you know I would never enter."

"With a little coasting schooner, formerly a smuggler craft, and which he had named the Winged Arrow, he was doing well and the future seemed bright before him."

"But it was not long before your father discovered that both he and his wife were avoided."

"Something seemed to be wrong, and a bitter persecution of him followed, for his vessel was seized as a smuggler, but released as no proof could be found against him."

"You and your brother were then little infants."

"My brother?" asked Malcolm, deeply interested in the story of his father's sad and strange career.

"Yes, for your mother gave birth to twins, you and your brother."

"And my brother?"

"Is dead; but to my story:

"A naval officer, Captain Fred Spruel of the coast guard cruiser Vidette, was one of your father's bitterest foes, it seemed, and on one night he caught the Winged Arrow in a position where her guilt as a smuggler seemed assured."

"I, however, commanded a craft, which I had been paid well to fit out and have a cargo of goods on board, which was supposed to be contraband, and for no other purpose than to entrap your father."

"You?"

"Yes, for I did not know then that he was the one to whom I owed my life."

"I carried out my plot, pretended my vessel was sinking, got your father to take the goods on board, and out upon us darted the coast guard Vidette and I said that the Winged Arrow was my confederate."

"Your father was seized, taken to Salem, and while my crew escaped with me and my

vessel, as was already planned before, he was tried, found guilty, and sent to prison."

"But when here I learned who he was, and so made my confession that your father was guiltless, and he was released."

"I forced the man in whose pay I was to do this, or risk exposure, and your father again went to sea, but this time as part owner in a vessel in which I owned the other half, and we were going as whalers."

"The man who bribed me, let me here tell you, to plot against Mark Mountjoy, had been his schoolmate in boyhood, and was his rival for the love of Lola La Salle, the maiden I told you your father had loved, and who became my father's second wife."

"Loving her, Ezra Vail, this arch-plotter, was determined to destroy your father in revenge, and in the end, by Heaven, he succeeded, for he brought your father to his death at the rope's end."

The youth sprung to his feet, and cried in a voice hoarse with passion:

"You say that my father was hanged?"

"Yes, and he was as innocent of the crime charged against him as you are, as his confession, which I have for you, will prove!"

"Before the high heavens I will cruelly avenge my father's death!" cried the boy sailor, and he raised his face and right hand, as though appealing to Heaven to register his vow.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SLEEP OF DEATH.

BE calm, Malcolm, for you must know all, and I am not strong," said the old sailor, Will Wildermere, when he saw how excited the youth had become, when the fate of his father had been made known to him.

"I am perfectly calm now, sir, so would know all," said the lad, suddenly gaining complete control over himself.

"That is right, my lad, always command yourself, and then you can command men."

"Never allow yourself to be surprised into showing that you are taken by surprise at anything."

"School your face to be marble when you wish it, and never show what you feel."

"Give me some more brandy, for I am failing fast, I fear."

The youth obeyed, and the old sailor resumed:

"I told you that your father was hanged."

"I must tell you how."

"He was, with me, part owner of a fine craft, and we started upon a whaling voyage."

"Your father was captain, I was first officer, and we had for second a Spaniard by the name of Estrella, and he had picked the crew, so they were his men."

"He led a mutiny, and your father was seized and put in irons, but offered his freedom if he would act as first luff under Estrella."

"I was made the same offer as second."

"Your father indignantly refused, but I accepted, for I had a plot in view."

"It was a long time before I could carry out my plot, and in the mean time Estrella had robbed the entire whaling fleet and many other vessels besides."

"Your father, often on deck, his feet in irons, was seen on board, and the result was that he was believed to be the pirate captain, and so went the report back to Salem."

"At last I had all ready to act, and struck my blow against Estrella; but it would have failed had not your father broken loose from the ringbolt that held him in the cabin, seized a cutlass, and making his way on deck, turned the tide in my favor so that we won the day."

"Well, he killed Estrella and reassumed command."

"Our ship was in a bad condition, however, and we were caught in a storm and wrecked."

"We took to our boats, and but one of the frail supports that I ever heard of reached a haven."

"That one was the boat containing your father and myself."

"Those with us died of starvation, but I reserved some food secretly and kept us alive."

"Well, we had the pirate treasure in our boat, and we brought it here."

"We buried our dead men, and we buried the iron box as we did them, and it is in one of the group of graves over which you put headboards, and cut the names of the dead in the wood."

"The one that holds the iron box is the one on whose board is the name 'Estrella,' which I gave to you as that of the man beneath."

"It was his treasure, you know, which your father and myself claimed as his heirs."

"After leaving the island we made our way to a seaport on the coast, and not wishing to use the pirate treasure, unless we were forced to do so, I decided to force my father to give to me ten thousand dollars with which we could buy another vessel."

"I asked your father to go to Peter Rutledge for me and demand it; for the money he had founded his fortune on was mine, as it had been my mother's."

"Peter Rutledge believed me dead, and hoped so, as he knew I could claim at least my mother's money."

"Your father went to his old rookery one night and made the demand.

"My father was wild at the thought of losing his gold, even a part of it, and attacked him, but with fatal result, for Peter Rutledge fell by the hand of Mark Mountjoy.

"In dismay your father fled, and he wandered into Salem, was recognized as the Whaler Freebooter, and a mob dragged him into the woods in the rear of the town and hanged him.

"I had gone to Salem, disguised as an old man, and found my way to your father's side and told him who I was, and that I knew all.

"He then demanded pen, ink and paper, and made a confession, which he gave to me to deliver to you when you grew to manhood.

"He bade me be as a father to you, to tell you what his confession did not tell, and to do my duty by you.

"I have done all in my power, for I sought you out, and, as the nurse who had you in keeping would not give you up, I kidnapped you when you were but three years old, and brought you here.

"I fitted out the shallop, for I had some money, with all we should need, and came here to this island, where lies the treasure.

"I sold out my interests in the city, when I was last there, and I have in this cabin ten thousand dollars in gold, every cent of which is yours.

"And more, that treasure in the grave belonged to your father and myself.

"It was our vessel and Estrella made us the sufferers, so what booty he gained we claimed, for who else can claim it.

"That treasure I now will to you. But until you need it do not touch it, as the ten thousand in the chimney yonder will be all you need for several years.

"I have taught you, my lad, all I could of the world and of men.

"You have not been brought up in ignorance, and to-day few men are better advanced than you are.

"You have studied hard, read much, and the glances you have had of the towns and people have told you what to expect, while no better sailor lives than you, young as you are.

"I am dying, soon will leave you, and then the world is before you to go your way.

"Ponder well before you make a step, and go forth into the world with this knowledge that your father met an ignominious death though an innocent man.

"The confession tells you who is your bitterest foe, and that man, your father's rival, and his son, now live, respected, honored and rich."

"But my mother, what of her?"

"Your mother?" and the old sailor spoke the words with deepest reverence.

"Yes, you have told me that my father was hanged as a pirate, my twin brother is dead, but you have told me nothing of my mother, so I ask you, Father Will, what of her?"

There was no answer, and so long did the youth await that he at last felt that the old sailor had dropped to sleep.

He had—he had sunk without a struggle into his last slumber—the eternal sleep of death.

CHAPTER VII.

A FATHER'S CONFESSION.

THE training which Malcolm, the Boy Hermit, had received, had fitted him well to battle with life.

He had been well taught by old Wildermere, as the Hermit Sailor had called himself after being driven from his miserly father's home, and the boy knew not the sensation of fear.

His insight into the world, personally, had been only from his glimpses of men and life at the seaports.

From the first he had been told by the hermit that he was not his son, and that some day he would learn all about his parents.

He had at last faced the moment when he must know all.

The Hermit Sailor had told him much of his father, but nothing of his mother.

His lips were now sealed by death, but he knew that his father's confession was left to him.

What would it tell to him that he did not know?

Many youths would have been awed in the presence of death, alone on that drear island.

But Malcolm calmly surveyed the face of the dead, his hand laid upon the forehead of the Hermit Sailor, while his eyes grew dim with unshed tears.

Long he remained thus, and then gently prepared the dead for burial.

With a sense of grim duty Wildermere had made for himself a coffin, and it was kept in an out-house near, and this the youth brought into the cabin.

The log fire cast a bright glare through the cabin, and by its light the Boy Hermit placed the body of the old sailor in the rude coffin. Then the youth went to a closet in the wall of the cabin and took therefrom a tin box, which he unlocked with one of several keys which he had taken from the hermit's belt.

The box contained several bags of gold, a red

morocco case also locked and a leather wallet of papers.

He glanced at the gold and laid it aside on the table, and a small key fitting the case he opened it.

There he saw revealed two miniatures set in gold, as was the style in those days.

One was the miniature of a young and very handsome man, dressed in a sea uniform, and the young hermit could not but see that he was strangely like the pictured face.

"It is my father," he said aloud and he read engraven beneath it the name, "Mark Mountjoy," with a date.

Then he gazed upon the other miniature, and involuntarily there broke from the lips of the Boy Hermit:

"It is my brother, I know! ah! how beautiful!"

Beneath this was the name "Alma Shields Mountjoy," with the same date that was beneath the miniature of Mark Mountjoy.

The face was of the Spanish type of beauty, and the artist had done his work well, portraying the exquisite loveliness of the features, the sad expression in the eyes and the full, red lips so full of passion.

For a long, long while the youth gazed upon the pictured faces of his parents, and his thoughts were busy the while.

It was hard for him to believe that the noble, handsome father he gazed upon had been strangled to death by a mob, and his brow grew dark, his lips sternly set as he recalled the scene it must have been.

And his mother? What had been her fate?

With almost dread he turned to the wallet of papers.

There were the log of the brig which had been turned into a pirate, by Estrella, and then he glanced over some old letters which gave him a further insight into the past of his parents.

Next came a paper written in a bold hand and addressed:

"TO MY SON MALCOLM."

There was a date on it, the date on which the Hermit Sailor had told him his father had met his death.

Then the Boy Hermit read aloud, slowly and in a voice that at times quivered with emotion, the following confession:

"With death, an ignominious death at the hands of a maddened mob, staring me in the face, my son, I write these lines to you, lines that will be given to you by my faithful friend, Will Wildermere, long after I am crumbled to dust.

"My life has been an unfortunate one, and I fear my own wild acts in youth led to the sorrows of future years that came upon me and others through me.

"Good Wildermere will tell you of my life, for he knows all; but let me tell you here, with death before me, that I am guiltless of the crime of which I am charged.

"As further proof than my word, the log of the brig, kept by Estrella, will tell the story of my sad lot, and his crimes, for which I am to suffer.

"Your mother loved me with the whole passion of her nature, and born a lady and reared in luxury, she came down to the poverty of my life without a murmur.

"But foes dogged my steps, and persecution well-nigh drove me mad.

"When at last I believed my sorrows were at an end, I found they were to be more cruelly severe, for one night a band of outlaws, bired I feel sure by my arch enemy, Ezra Vail, landed at my home to kill me, or carry me off.

"Better had it been that death came to me then; but, instead, your noble mother was the sacrifice, for she fell dead under their murderous fire upon me.

"I was wounded and it was long ere I was again myself.

"Then I found a green mound in the little churchyard to mark where lay the ashes of my wife, your mother, and you were under the care of a faithful nurse, who told me the sad story of your twin brother's death.

"Then it was I went with good Wildermere upon the whaling voyage, and was made out the pirate these people now believe me.

"Wildermere will tell you of my mission to his father; but, let me tell you, my son, that I fled from that scene with horror, for in Peter Rutledge, the man I was forced to kill on that night, I recognized the husband of Lola La Salle, the one I had loved in my boyhood, and she, coming into the room at her husband's cries, saw, and knew me.

"Then I fled, and caring not where I went, drifted to Salem, and lo, here I am in the hands of merciless men.

"Such is the confession, my son, that your father makes to you, and Heaven forgive me if I say that I hope, through you, the one who made me suffer must be made to feel something of the agony they brought upon me and mine.

But I must close, for my murderers grow impatient for my blood.

"Wildermere will give to you my share of old Estrella's pirate treasure—it is yours, your father's legacy, and it is my wish that you may become a sailor.

"Farewell.

"Your father,
"MARK MOUNTJOY."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SAILOR-BOY HERMIT.

WHEN the dawn crept into the cabin of the Hermit of the Isle, the young sailor lad was still awake, for he had not closed his eyes during the night.

He had read his father's confession, and then

jotted down on the back of it the various things told him by old Wildermere.

He had often taken up the miniatures and gazed upon them, and then had read the logs of the pirate brig through several times.

Thus had the Sailor-Boy Hermit passed the long hours of that dismal night of storm in the cabin, with the coffin of the old Sailor Hermit before his eyes, and his father's confession in his hand.

With the dawn he went out and looked about him.

The storm still raged in fury, and the sea dashed against the island with a force that made it tremble at times, as though it would be forced from its foundation.

The skies were overcast and it was growing colder, for winter was coming on rapidly.

Back among the pines went the young sailor, until he came to the graves of the dead seamen of the brig, whom his father and Wildermere had buried there.

"Yes, that is the grave of her treasure, and its head-board tells a lie," he said, bitterly.

"No, I will not bury him here, but over yonder on the cliff, where his grave can be in sight of the sea.

"It was his favorite point of lookout."

He retraced his way to the cabin, secured a spade and shovel, and going to the cliff he had referred to, began to dig a grave beneath a huge pine that stood there.

He worked hard and at last it was ready for the dead, and he went back to the cabin to cook his breakfast.

This he soon got rid of and taking the coffin upon his shoulder the young sailor lad bore it to the grave and lowered it into its last resting-place.

The grave was filled in, and upon the face of a large rock that was at its head, with chisel and hammer the lad cut the name of the sailor and his date of death, with the words:

"TRUE AS STEEL."

A fitting tribute were the words to the memory of Wildermere the Hermit of the Isle.

Having done his duty to the dead, Malcolm returned to the cabin to again look at the miniature likeness of his parents, and to go over and over the confession, the letters, and the pirate brig's log.

All through the day, and the next, the storm continued and then a calm followed.

It seemed to soothe the heart of the young sailor, in whose breast had now been surging a tempest of hate, of bitterness and sorrow.

He then went over the money that had been left him by the old hermit and said:

"This will do me; but I must know about that treasure, though I care not for it now."

He went out to the grave on whose headboard was the name of Estrella, and began to throw the dirt out of it.

It was dug deep, but at last his work was rewarded by the ring of metal against metal, and with a considerable effort he raised out of its narrow bed an iron box such as ships used as treasure-chests in the olden time.

It was about two feet long by eighteen inches wide, and as many in height.

It was so heavy that, strong as he was, the youth had some difficulty bearing it to the cabin, and there a key, from the old hermit's bunch, was at last turned in the rusted lock and the lid opened.

The contents revealed some leather bags of gold and silver, and many of them, with some jewels and trinkets, evidently taken from some grand ladies whom the pirate brig had robbed on board packet ships at sea.

There were a pair of pistols of rare workmanship, several knives, Spanish and Italian, the hilts of gold and gem studded, and a few watches and rings of value.

The young hermit looked over all, made an estimate of the value of the jewelry as best he could, and the gems, counted the money, and said, with some show of excitement in voice and manner:

"What a fortune is here.

"And it is all mine; yes, all mine.

"It is my inheritance from my father and dear old Wildermere; and I will use it well, when the time comes that I need it."

He returned the treasure to the iron box, locked it up once more and bore it back to the grave.

With block and tackle, rigged to a limb over the grave, the Sailor-Boy Hermit lowered the treasure-box back into its resting-place and then carefully filled in the grave once more.

The winter had now set in, and the boy made up his mind to remain on the island until the spring should come.

He knew that for himself alone he had stores enough on board the shallop to last him for six months, and these were carried up to the cabin.

Then the shallop was swung upon davits projecting over a rocky shelf, and made secure for the winter.

Among his purchases when last in a port, the youth had a number of books, some maps and other things with which he could add to his knowledge of the world and its people, and he determined to spend the long months of winter

in earnest study, which would the better fit him for the career he meant to follow.

He was a natural-born sailor, and he had a love for the sea that was intense, while a vessel to him was the most beautiful thing in creation.

He had built miniature boats, and the old sailor had told him he was a genius in that line and some day to have a boat built after one of his models and it would outsail the very wind.

He had never forgotten the advice, and during the winter he rebuilt his model, from keel to truck, and placed it away for future use when the time would come that he should need a vessel.

Thus the young Sailor Hermit passed the long winter months, and that it taught him self-reliance and much that was useful to him in future years there could be no doubt.

At last the icy winds ceased to blow, the sunshine held warmth in it enough to bring out the leaves on the trees and make the grass spring up fresh and green.

The shallop was lowered into the basin, scraped, painted and put in perfect sea-going trim, and one morning in May the young hermit closed his cabin, cast a lingering look of farewell upon the grave of old Wildermere and all on the island, and going on board the shallop hoisted sail and glided out of the little harbor.

He had decided upon his future and sailed away to begin the career that was before him.

CHAPTER IX.

FAITHLESS TO HER TRUST.

A WOMAN sat in a small but comfortable home, back in the mountains of Vermont.

It was a farm-house, situated back from the village of Bellows Falls, and from the little porch in front a fine view of the valley, with its winding stream and here and there a hamlet, clustering around a church, could be seen.

The woman had a kind, strong face, and there were traces about her of having possessed great beauty as a girl, and which old age had not faded, for she was scarcely over thirty, but rather sorrow, for its stamp had been indelibly stamped upon her features.

She was neatly dressed, and she was watching the capers of two wee children who were playing upon a rug near her.

"Ah me, if they were only mine," she resumed, sadly.

"They would be a tie to bind me to earth, for I love them so.

"If they were but mine! but I have no child or kindred to bless my latter years.

"Twelve years ago in this very spot I was a happy girl of seventeen, pure as the snow then, joyous as the birds.

"I recall it as though it were but yesterday, and the dear old parents I loved so well, my brother and my sister.

"Yonder tomb in the shadow of the church rests over the ashes of my parents now, and of Sophy, my sister, while my brother was lost at sea.

"I recall that evening when a stranger sought to swim his horse across the swollen river, when the ferry was washed away, and how I dragged him out of the waters unconscious.

"He spent weeks here, our guest, and I loved him so.

"Then, forgetting the hospitality shown him, the gratitude he owed my parents, he urged me to run away with him, and weak and wicked I yielded.

"Ah, me! he treated me well, and for two years I was happy—then she came, his wife, and I knew that I was not a wife, that he had deceived me cruelly.

"He deserted me then, yes, my child and I, and I wandered about getting work as I could, for I dared not come home.

"Then my child died, and it is strange that I did not end my days.

"But something urged me against it, and at last I got the place as nurse with that lovely woman, Mrs. Mountjoy, to care for her little twin boys.

"Ah me! how sad her fate, and when she fell under the fire those lawless men poured upon her husband, I fled with the two little darlings, and some strange impulse brought me back here to my old home.

"I found my parents, my sister, my brother dead; but the little home and the farm had been left to me.

"It seems so strange for me to be here, and with these two little ones, the darlings.

"But their father will not make me give them up, I hope, for I would so long to care for them.

"He is wounded now, but is better, the letter of the doctor said, and he hinted that he wanted me to come back soon with the babies.

"And must I give them up?

"No, he will go to sea again, so I will beg him to let me keep them, to be as their mother.

"I see the mail-coach coming, so I will go to the village and find out if there is a letter for me.

"I feel so nervous at the thought of giving up these darlings," and she took the two children up in her arms and kissed and fondled them with the deepest affection.

Then she carried them back into the kitchen, and leaving them in the care of an old servant woman who with her husband had been in the family for two-score years, she put on her bonnet and walked down to the village, a mile and a half away.

"Any letter for Miss Phoebe Farrar?" she asked, giving the name of her girlhood, for she had no claim upon the name of the man who had deceived her.

The freckled-face boy behind the counter of the store, where the letters were opened, handed her one, and she hastened away, ere she broke the seal.

On her way home she opened it and sitting down on a fallen tree read:

"SALEM, Oct. 10th, 18—.

"DEAR MISS FARRAR—:

"You will see by this letter that I am again able to be up, for my wounds are healing rapidly, and I must once more begin the struggle of life, for though my poor wife is dead, I have my little ones to live and care for.

"Living with us as you have the past year, you know how cruelly I have been persecuted; but I do not despair and shall sell out here, invest my little all in a vessel and go away on a long voyage somewhere.

"You have proven yourself so devoted to our interests, and so good to the little ones, that I wish to have you still remain as their nurse, and will try and manage it so, for a dear friend of mine offers to take them to bring up for me.

"But please bring them to Salem next week, and let me have them near until I go to sea.

"I am glad you took them away with you, for the mountain air will do them a world of good.

"Expecting you next week, I remain,

"Very sincerely,

"MARK MOUNTJOY."

The woman crumpled the letter in her hand almost savagely, and springing to her feet walked rapidly on homeward.

There was a strange look upon her face, and she said over and over again as she walked away:

"I will not give them up—not both of them, no, not both.

"The friend who will take them is that rich old maid, Miss Kettridge, the aunt of Major Deering, and she would have her own nurse to care for them and give me up.

"No, I will not give both of them up."

One week after Phoebe Farrar faced the father of the little twin boys, and her face was sad as she told her story to the man who must needs be dealt another blow, for he was informed that one of his children was dead.

It had sickened one night and suddenly died, and in the burying-ground of her own people Phoebe Farrar had buried the little innocent.

"My God! must I ever be dragged by adversity and sorrow?" cried the stricken man in a voice that quivered with intense emotion as he looked back over his sad past.

Then the woman turned appealingly to him and said:

"Let me bring it up, for I know the little fellow so well, and will be as a mother to it."

"I am sorry, Miss Farrar, but I promised Miss Kittredge she should have them, and I must keep my word as far as this little one is concerned, though I would have been glad to have had him with you, had I known you wished it."

"Indeed I do wish it, and yet I must yield.

"But did you ask her if she would take me as his nurse?"

"Yes, but she has her own nurse, who has always been with her."

"Well, sir, tell me if she needs me at any time, a letter to Hillside Farm, Bellows Falls, Vermont, will reach me," and the woman turned away, and, having delivered her little charge up at The Harborage, the home of Miss Kittredge, she returned to her home.

Ten days after the neighbors about Bellows Falls were surprised to learn that Miss Phoebe Farrar had sold Hillside Farm for so much cash, bade farewell to her old servants and gone no one knew where.

Had there been a suspicion in the heart of Mark Mountjoy that all was not right, and a detective had been put upon the track of the woman, he would have found her dwelling in a neat little cottage on the Highlands of Navesink, overlooking New York Bay and the broad Atlantic beyond.

She had appeared there one day, purchased a little farm for cash, and with an old negress and a farm hand had settled down to a quiet life.

But there was another member in her family that must not be overlooked.

It was a tiny boy—the little child of Mark Mountjoy who was supposed to be dead and in the grave in the Farrar burying-ground near Bellows Falls, Vermont.

And to the neighbors about her new home, Phoebe Farrar was known only as the "Widow Wanda."

CHAPTER X.

A PIRATE'S SON.

WHEN Mark Mountjoy had sailed in the brig, of which he was part owner, and Will Wildermere his partner, he had felt that he was leaving adversity in his wake, for what other sorrows could follow him?

His wife was in her grave, one of his little twin boys was buried, as he believed, in Vermont, and the other was in the care of a kind friend in Miss Kittredge, the wealthy mistress of The Harborage.

But the reader has seen that the cruellest of all adversities befell him, for he was seized as a mutineer, put in irons, and men believed him to be the pirate that was sweeping the seas.

Then came the recapture of his vessel, the shipwreck, the return home, the killing of old Miser Rutledge, his flight and fearful death at the hands of a mob.

He had intrusted to Will Wildermere his boy, believing that Miss Kittredge would believe him also guilty, and wish to get rid of the little Malcolm, and his shipmate in adversity had gone to The Harborage, and, when the lady indignantly refused to give up her little *protege*, he had decided that there was but one thing to be done—*kidnap him*.

The little Malcolm had been intrusted to his keeping, he had his inheritance, the pirates' treasure, on the island on the coast of Maine, and he would keep his pledge to Mark Mountjoy and rear the child to manhood.

And so, believing that he was doing his duty in keeping his pledge to Mark Mountjoy, Will Wildermere laid his plots well, and one night the wee Malcolm was missing from The Harborage, and though Miss Kittredge spent large sums in search of him and his kidnapper, they could not be found.

And no wonder, for the night he had stolen the boy, Will Wildermere had carried him on board his shallop and set sail for the Treasure Island on the Coast of Maine, there to live the life of a hermit, and rear Malcolm Meredith, as he called him, in his own way, as has been seen, until at last the young heir to the pirates' treasure, set sail one spring morning alone in the shallop to carve out his future in his own way.

And his twin brother, whom Phoebe Farrar had falsely said was dead, and whose form was supposed to be lying in the little grave in the churchyard near Bellows Falls?

He, too, had been raised in the sight of the sea, for from the cottage in the highlands the wild surf of the Atlantic was plainly visible as it thundered upon the shores of Sandy Hook.

In the winters, as the boy grew in years, the "Widow Wanda," as she chose to be known, went up to the city and the boy was sent to school; but, in the summer months he was almost constantly upon the waters, for his pretended mother had bought for him a sail-boat, and in it he would dare the worst storms on the bay.

He would go out with the bold fishermen in their little craft, and the daring spirit of the lad attracting the attention of the fearless pilots, who went far out to sea in their stanch schooners, that were wont to take him with them on their cruises, and in this way he learned much of vessels and the sea, and heard of the great world beyond the ocean.

One day the lad returned from an extended cruise in a craft that had gone to the West Indies.

He had urged his so-called mother to allow him to go on the voyage, and a month after an incoming vessel had brought in a boat picked up at sea, and bearing the name of the brig in which the boy had sailed.

Other vessels coming in had picked up *debris* at sea, also having come from the brig, and there was no doubt but that she had gone down in a storm, or been cast ashore.

The Widow Wanda was wild with grief, and she so mourned for her lost boy that she broke down and went to bed with brain fever.

And one morning the boy came into the cottage.

The brig had been wrecked, but he and several others had escaped, and he had worked his way back from Cuba on a clipper-ship.

And he found his adopted mother raving in delirium and calling to him again and again to come back to her.

That night he took the place of the old nurse and sat up with her.

At midnight she awoke with a start, and then came the startling words uttered in delirium:

"Don't haunt me, Mark Mountjoy, and I'll tell you all—yes, I see the mark of the cruel rope about your neck, made when they hanged you, and I know you rest uneasy in your grave, searching for your lost boy, Malcolm—did I say Malcolm? Well, I forgot which one it was—they were so alike you know, and so I had to call him Malcolm, because I thought he was the one I pretended was dead, and told you I buried at Bellows Falls.

"But he is not dead, Mark Mountjoy, so why should you, a ghost, look for your son on earth?

"Go back to your grave and leave him to me, for he is a brave, bonnie boy now.

"Yes, a lad who dares do what any man dare, and they say he is the best sailor, and the boldest, man or boy, on this wild coast.

"I tell you, Mark Mountjoy, that your son—whom I call by his Christian name, Malcolm Meredith, is alive and well—why should I call him by your name, when you died on the gallows?

"Ha, ha, ha! No, I kept that stain from off the boy, Captain Mark Mountjoy—his mother shot down by the lawless men who sought your life, and you afterward hanged for piracy."

"It is better that the brave lad knows not all this, and so I keep him here as my son, and he shall know nothing of the past."

"I deceived you when I told you he was dead, but then I loved him so, so God will forgive my crime!"

"But where is my boy now?"

"Ship ahoy! Have you spoken the brig Black Swan, and was my boy, Malcolm Meredith, on board?"

"They said the brig was lost, but no, no! it cannot be that my boy is dead."

"His father's ghost is here demanding him of me! Ship ahoy! ship ahoy! send my brave boy back to me!"

She fairly shrieked out the latter words, and the lad, who had sat like one spellbound, sprung to his feet and approached the bed.

But the effort had exhausted her, and she had fallen back and dropped into a deep sleep.

White-faced, with compressed lips, the boy stood gazing upon her.

He had heard from her lips, in the raving of delirium, the story of his life.

He could not doubt it, even though the words were prompted by the fever-racked brain of the woman.

The story was too well told.

At last he said, and his voice was low and trembling:

"So you are not my mother."

"How strange that I have often felt and believed you were not."

"And my own mother was slain by a lawless band, who sought my father's life?"

"And my father was hanged as a pirate?"

"And you stole me from my father, and made him believe that I was dead."

"My God! what have I not heard this night from the lips of a delirious woman?"

"Henceforth I go my way, if she gets well; but she need not know all I have heard of her crime."

"No, I will go my way in the world, and she, if she lives, can remain here; but she has been good to me, has loved me, cared for me through infancy and boyhood, until I now stand upon the threshold of manhood, and she shall never know want; no, I shall care for her to the end of her life."

"But there is work for me to do, for I must know all of the past—I must solve the mysteries that hung over Mark Mountjoy, my father!"

He paced the room until the moonlight stole in, and the woman all the while slept peacefully.

Then the nurse came in, and soon after she called him, for "his mother" had awakened, and was conscious.

Her fever and delirium had left her.

Gladly she welcomed him back, as from the grave, and with him near her she rapidly gained her former health.

He waited until she was wholly well, and then one day told her that he was going on a long voyage.

Entreaties were useless, for he was firm, and one day a good ship sailed around Sandy Hook, and shaped her course across the seas, and upon her decks was Mark Mountjoy's other son, also going to seek his fortune in the world.

CHAPTER XI.

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON.

UPON a ridge, overlooking the pretty town of Salem, in the grand old commonwealth of Massachusetts, there were visible, until a few years ago, the walls of what had once been a very elegant house.

It was built of stone, and in the days of which I write, was classed among Salem's most elegant mansions.

It was the abode of Ezra Vail, the rich whaler captain and merchant, whom the Salemites delighted to honor.

Captain Vail had formerly lived in another seaport town, where he had a branch of his large shipping firm, but for reasons best known to himself, had decided to make Salem his home.

So he had bought Hillside Hall, paying cash for it, and furnished it with an elegance that amazed the simple citizens of the town.

He got about him half a score of servants, had horses, carriages, a yacht, and seemed to make the best of his riches.

And yet he was not married, for his wife had died leaving him a young boy to raise.

This boy, Rupert Vail, had been given every advantage, and grew up with the belief instilled in his mind that he was to be the richest young man in New England.

Ezra Vail had a secret romance in his life, and one which seemed to have brought out his true nature.

He had loved most desperately a young girl in his native town by the name of Lola La Salle, who had a sister Ethel, equally as beautiful as herself, and strangely like her, for they were twins.

But Lola, from her earliest childhood had

found her boy hero and lover in the Episcopal clergyman's son, Mark Mountjoy, and thus Ezra Vail had hated that young man with all the venom in his nature, and, refused by Lola, he had gone away from home and married an heiress, who, dying, left him their son Rupert to rear.

A widower, he had again sought to wed Lola La Salle, and was again discarded, and then he sought her sister's hand.

But Ethel had a lover in Roland Monte, a gallant young naval officer, and Ezra Vail was again refused.

Then Lola married old Peter Rutledge, the miser, and this so infuriated the whaler captain that he vowed to be one day avenged for the slight cast upon him.

Long years passed by and changes came, for where Ezra Vail added to his wealth, Mark Monte, the naval officer, who gave up his vessel to go into the merchant service, met with only bad luck, and when lost at sea left his wife and two children nothing, while Lola, she who had loved Mark Mountjoy and had sacrificed herself to Peter Rutledge, the miser, to save her parents from financial ruin, saw afterward that the sacrifice was in vain, and was sentenced to death upon the gallows as the murderess of her husband.

In her cell the reader has seen her, a short while before her execution, and it was Ethel Monte, her sister, who had found misfortune dog her steps almost from the day of poor Lola's death.

With this explanation I will ask the reader to accompany me to the elegant home of Ezra Vail.

The master was seated in his library, after supper, enjoying a cigar and with a decanter of sherry at his elbow.

He was a fine-looking man of fifty or thereabouts, dressed with the neatness of a fop, and wore considerable jewelry.

About him was every luxury heart could wish, and volumes of rare books were at hand on the shelves.

But Captain Vail was not in a reading mood, and sat gazing into the log fire with the air of a man whose thoughts were far away and not of the pleasantest either.

At last the hall door went to with a bang, a quick step was heard, and into the library came a young man of striking appearance.

That he was Rupert Vail, the son of the rich merchant, a glance revealed, so much were they alike.

He was tall, elegantly formed, dressed flashily, and affected jewelry as did his father.

Upon his face there was stamped intelligence and boldness, and it was a very handsome face, too.

"Ah, Rupert, I have been hoping you would come in, for I have something important to say to you."

"Sit down and help yourself to a glass of sherry and a cigar."

The young man threw himself into an easy-chair before the fire, dashed off a couple of glasses of sherry and, almost viciously it seemed, bit the end off a cigar and lighted it.

"You seem worried, my son."

"I am."

"And why?"

"Well, with all my money and good looks, for I know I am not ugly, I cannot win that girl, Ethel Monte; but I feel that I could do so if it were not for her brother."

"Ah! there is the rub—her brother; and it is upon this subject I wish to speak with you, my son."

"All right, father, out with it; but I love her, though she has not a dollar, and in spite of the charges brought against her brother."

"Bah! he was lucky enough to disprove all of them."

"But, Rupert, you have often wondered at the strange interest that I have taken in young Mark Monte and his beautiful sister, Ethel, and some day I promised to tell you."

"Yes, I have wondered, for you generally are not interested in paupers, and they are little better."

"In fact I was amazed when you told me to go in and win the girl, and wondered what there was behind your consent to do so."

"I'll tell you; and as sherry is not a good foundation for a long story, get the brandy decanter and fill up the cigar-case, for the servants have gone to bed."

The son lazily obeyed, and then said:

"Now, father, I am all ears for that story."

"Well, I must begin a long way back, when I loved the mother of Mark and Ethel Monte, for I never loved your mother, my son."

"Indeed?" and the young man frowned.

"No; I married her out of spite, when Lola La Salle, that was the maiden name of the woman I loved, refused me."

"And yet you turned Mrs. Monte out of her home and persecuted her."

"You have gotten over your love for her and let revenge take its place."

"No; I loved her to the last; but I never loved Mrs. Monte, though I asked her also to marry me, for she was Lola's twin sister."

"You speak in riddles, father, for you just

said you loved the mother of Mark and Ethel Monte."

"And so I did; but Mrs. Monte was not their mother, nor was Captain Roland Monte their father."

The young man laughed, and asked, impudently:

"Have you lost your senses, father?"

"No; I mean what I say."

"You tell me that this young sailor, Mark Monte, and his beautiful sister Ethel, who has refused to be my wife, are not the children of the gentleman and lady whom I used to know as Captain Roland Monte and wife?"

"They are not."

"Why, father, you—"

"They were their adopted children."

"Nonsense!"

"You remember of hearing how, long years ago, Mrs. Peter Rutledge killed her husband and was hanged for it at G—?"

"I do; and she was Mrs. Monte's sister."

"She was; and these are the children of the woman who died on the gallows, Lola La Salle that was, the one whom I loved, and who loved Mark Mountjoy, who was hanged as a pirate not a hundred yards from where we now are," was the response of Ezra Vail, and his look showed that he knew he was making a startling assertion to his son.

CHAPTER XII.

A LEAF FROM THE PAST.

RUPERT VAIL sat a moment as though trying to fully master the situation as revealed to him by his father.

He knew that Captain Roland Monte, an ex-naval officer, had met with misfortune, and been lost at sea, leaving his wife and two children, Mark and Ethel, to mourn his loss, and also leaving them penniless.

Mark, the son, had been a sailor on board his father's vessel, and upon him had devolved the care of his mother and sister.

But for some reason his father had seemed to wish to dog young Monte's life with adversity, while he, Rupert, loving Mark's sister, had been surprised that his stern parent, loving riches as he did, urged him to win the beautiful girl.

His father had hinted to him, as a secret, that Mrs. Monte was the sister of Lola Rutledge, who had been hanged for the murder of her husband, and this was another reason that Rupert could not understand why his father raised no objection to his marrying Ethel Monte.

These thoughts flashed through the mind of the young man, as he sat in silence after his father's words, and then he said:

"Father, I hope you intend to let me understand the situation thoroughly, and not keep me in the dark."

"We are interested together in all affairs, and I know your business as well as you do yourself, so if there is any thing obscure that you can throw light upon for me, pray do so."

"That is just what I intend to do, and I have begun by telling you that Mark and Ethel are the children of the hanged woman whom I loved."

"Now I'll go back and let you into a secret."

"I hope so."

"When Lola cast me off, and loved Mark Mountjoy it made me revengeful toward both of them."

"When she was condemned to be hanged, for the murder of her husband, old Miser Rutledge, I went to her in the jail, and told her I would aid her to escape and would go far away from here with her, if she would marry me."

"And her answer?"

"It shames me to tell you, my son, that she drew a jewel-bitted knife upon me and drove me from her cell."

"Spunky, wasn't she?" and Rupert laughed, a laugh his father did not like; but he said:

"Yes, she was full of grit, and told me she preferred being hanged to becoming Mrs. Ezra Vail."

Again Rupert laughed, and the father said: "You seem to enjoy my discomfiture, while, when Mark Monte gave you that severe thrashing awhile ago, you who had never met your match, I felt sympathy for you."

"Curse him!" hissed Rupert Vail between his teeth, and his humor at his father's expense was at once checked.

The old man smiled grimly, and muttered to himself:

"That was a shot that silenced him."

Then aloud he continued:

"Now, after I left the jail I saw a carriage drive up and a lady in black and deeply veiled enter."

"She remained there a long while, and I followed her to the train, saw her take passage in the coach and leave the town."

"I put a spy on her track, and though she had not given her own name at the inn or put it on the stage-coach books, but that of 'Madam Roland.' I knew she was Ethel Monte, the wife of Captain Roland Monte."

"My detective followed her to a certain house, where the children of Lola Monte were with

their nurse, and the latter was well paid and dismissed and the two little ones taken away.

"I then ran down to the town where Captain Roland Monte, then a naval officer lived, and found that he had changed his place of abode.

"For years I could not find them, and then, as captain of a merchant vessel Roland Monte appeared in Salem, bought Cliff Cottage and brought his wife and the children he pretended were his.

"One was Mark, the other Ethel.

"Now Lola Rutledge had named her son after her old lover, Mark Mountjoy, and her daughter after her sister Ethel.

"These two are her children, and her sister adopted them, no one knowing that they were not her own."

"And yet you are willing for me to marry the daughter of a woman who died on the gallows."

"You are the only one who knows this, besides myself, for the children, I am sure, do not know it."

"As for that I do not personally care, for I guess I love this girl as dearly as you did her dead mother who was hanged.

"Perhaps so; but let me go on with my story."

"I am all attention, dear father," replied the young man, pouring out a stiff glass of brandy and dashing it off.

The father followed suit, smacked his lips, and continued:

"You are not aware, I believe, that the estate of Peter Rutledge was a very large one?"

"I have heard it said that he was rich."

"Yes, and he left to his wife all he possessed, with full executive powers, and this was a strong case against her at the trial, for it was said that she wished to get rid of him and have his money."

"I see."

"Well, when she died she made a will."

"Ah!"

"She left to her two children, Mark and Ethel, equally, her entire fortune, to be held in keeping for them by the Bank of the Commonwealth, and to be given to them when they reached the ages of twenty-one and eighteen respectively."

"Aha, my dear father, I begin to see through a millstone."

"The bank officials were sworn to secrecy as to the children, and were to invest their property for the best profits, and they have done so.

"Now those three bank officers are dead and the bank holds the property, subject to the demand of the heirs, on proof of their rights.

"In case either heir died, the other was to get all.

"These proofs the heirs have, and Mark Monte, as he is called, will soon be twenty-one, and his sister eighteen.

"Neither know that they are not Captain and Ethel Monte's children, and neither know that they are heirs to a large fortune, but have been told to go to the bank at a certain date and send in their names and certain papers will be turned over to them.

"Now do you begin to see light ahead?"

"I do, my wise and respected father, I do," was the earnest response of the young man.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PLOT FOR GOLD.

CAPTAIN EZRA VAIL helped himself to a glass of brandy and water, and lighted a fresh cigar, with the air of a man who had more to say, and knew its full importance.

Rupert Vail, now deeply interested and no longer sneering, sat awaiting his father to continue his narrative, and he did not again touch the decanter of brandy, for he wished to have a clear head to understand all, to grasp the situation completely.

"Now, Rupert, knowing these facts as I did, I wished to work to get possession of Lola Rutledge's inheritance to her children.

"As a bank officer I discovered these facts, from one of the then executors, who asked my advice, giving no names, and yet I knew just who was meant, especially as at trustee meetings the property known as the 'Rutledge Estate,' was constantly coming up for discussion.

"I know that the estate has increased in value ten-fold, so that those two, Mark and Ethel Monte, will be either of them far richer than I am, wealthy as I am to-day, while should Mark die, his sister would be the sole heir."

"I see, dear father, I see it all."

"Now, as though to play into my hands to win, along comes Mark Mountjoy, Lola's lover, when you were a little boy, and I did all in my power to end his career, knowing he would be in my way if I sought to get possession of the Rutledge property, and then I hated him, so acted for revenge.

"I got Captain Spruel, then the commander of the coast guard cruiser, in my debt, and made him my tool to get rid of Mark Mountjoy, who with his wife, a Southern lady, lived at what you now know as Cliff Cottage, but then was called the Ivy Lodge.

"He had two children, twin boys, and at last I got him hanged by a mob, after his poor wife

had been killed by a lawless gang in my pay, who had attacked him at his home."

"You are painting yourself in glowing colors, father mine."

"I am telling the truth to my son, whom I know to be of the same stripe as myself."

"Ah, yes, like father like son; but to your most entertaining story."

"I had no wish to harm Mrs. Mountjoy, but she was killed by accident, and her husband badly wounded.

"But he recovered, and found one of his children had died, and what became of the other twin the Lord only knows, for I could not find out.

"Mountjoy went to sea, half owner in a whaler, and she became a pirate; but I believe he was not guilty, for his crew mutinied and held him prisoner.

"But the brig attacked the whaling fleets, and did much damage as a cruiser, but was wrecked at last.

"Mountjoy escaped and came to Salem, was recognized, and a little urging of the mob on from me, in a quiet way, caused them to hang him as a pirate."

"But he was innocent?"

"Doubtless, but I had my revenge."

"I see."

"Three years passed and I came here to live, purchasing this place, to keep my eye upon the Widow Monte and her children.

"Then you remember, when our brig Dart was about to sail from G— how our second mate failed to come, and just then a young man came up and applied for a berth?"

"Oh, yes, Mark Monte."

"True, and he went as second mate; but I had told my Arab mate, Selim, whom you recall I saved from death, and who served me as a slave would, to kill Mark Monte, if he had to destroy the brig to do so.

"He made the attempt, and the craft was lost on the coast of Africa, and Mark Monte alone escaped, as we believed, and was for a long while a prisoner to Arabs."

"I know all this, father, for it was when taking his pay to his mother and sister I learned to love the beautiful Ethel."

"Yes; but he escaped and returned, when I was sure Ethel was the only heir, and I had him arrested and tried for mutiny, and he would have been hanged, had not the Dart's skipper, who also had escaped from the wreck, appeared and cleared him."

"Why review this, father, for do I not know it all?"

"Oh, yes, but it comes into my story as I tell it."

"Now when Mark Monte returned, you know, I was about to force Mrs. Monte out of her home, which I had bought, for non-payment of rent."

"And she was dying at the time."

"So I discovered, but at the time I believed it was put on, that she was playing sick."

"Mark Monte, to get me to let his mother remain, signed a paper, pledging himself to obey my bidding whenever I should call upon him, for any service, if I would let his mother remain in possession for a month longer."

"In that time, I recall, that he got money and offered you the rent, but you refused, so you must still hold this paper against him?"

"I do, Rupert, and I shall force him to sign away, for a certain consideration, all of his inheritance, for as he has escaped my plots against his life, his sister alone shall have all that estate, and she is to be your wife."

"Why she has refused me time and again."

"Do I not know that?"

"But she can be forced into a marriage with you."

"I almost half-believe she is engaged to this Captain Malcolm Meredith, of the Red Dove, who has been such a foe of the whalers."

"No, he saved her life, you remember, the day her skiff upset in the harbor, and she may love him, for she will not believe him to be a pirate; but she did not marry him before he sailed upon his buccaneering cruise."

"I sincerely hope not, for if she did not, then I shall force her to marry me."

"It must be done, but how?"

"Why, we can get her brother into a tight place, say arrest him as a smuggler or pirate, and vow he shall hang if she does not become my wife."

"You are a good plotter, my son, I am glad to see."

"And more, we must get this fellow, Meredith, and hang him, so if she should secretly be his wife, we can readily make her a widow, and then you can marry her."

"Certainly; but we must not act openly."

"Oh, no; gold will buy others to act for us, while we may appear to have nothing to do in the matter."

"This pirate, Malcolm Meredith, has hit us hard in the pocket, father."

"Yes, but we will even up with him when we catch him."

"Yes; when we catch him."

"Well, the fleet will soon be home, and then we will know all; but he certainly has proven himself a foe to the whalers, and I'll give my

best ship to catch and hang him," said the old whaler, who, to get gold, had been guilty of many crimes, and was still plotting others.

Like him in character was his only child, Rupert Vail, who was swayed by his love of riches, revenge, and the love of Ethel Monte.

The old whaler had gained his revenge in the hanging of Mark Mountjoy, his rival in the past, and now he meant to get the gold of the woman he had loved, and who had refused him, by gaining possession of her children's fortune.

He alone knew that Mark and Ethel were not Mrs. Monte's children, but those of her sister, Lola Rutledge, who had been hanged.

That the children knew of the fortune awaiting them he knew was not the case, or they would not have lived in poverty.

And certainly Mrs. Monte had died before she could tell them the true story of who they were, if indeed she had intended to do so, having reared them as her own children.

Thus stood matters when Captain Ezra Vail and his son Rupert set to work to plot the death of Mark Monte, which would leave his sister Ethel sole heir, and then she must marry Rupert Vail, by fair means if possible, by foul if necessary.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HEIRS.

CLIFF COTTAGE was a pretty little house on the shore of Salem Harbor.

It was a place with a history, for in the past, a score of years before, it had been the home of Mark Mountjoy, who had been hanged as a pirate by a Salem mob, and there had his beautiful wife met her death at the hands of lawless midnight marauders.

And for the misery in the past life, the cruel end of Mark Mountjoy and his wife, Captain Ezra Vail had been in the main responsible, for he had dogged his enemy as untiringly as he now meant to dog Mark Monte, and in fact had already done so.

Cliff Cottage was delightfully located, had six rooms in it, a pretty flower garden, with a rustic arbor in front, a kitchen garden and stable in the rear, with a pretty piece of woodland near and hills in the background.

That there had been stories of the past regarding the cottage, Mrs. Monte knew when she went there, but seemed not to care.

What she knew of that past she kept to herself, and the secret of her visit to the jail to see her condemned sister, and that Mark and Ethel were not her children, but those of the beautiful woman who had died on the gallows, she also kept hidden in her heart.

And in that cottage Mrs. Monte also died, and her lips revealed not the story to Mark and Ethel of their birth, and so no suspicion came to them that they were not the children of Captain Roland Monte and his wife.

Upon his return from his life of a slave among the Arabs, Mark Monte had found his mother, as he supposed her to be, dying, and the cottage sold and stripped of furniture, all gone to give her what comforts she could have in her last hours.

In his despair, penniless and wretched, the young sailor had signed a paper, a pledge, as it were, to obey the bidding of Captain Ezra Vail, and then he and his sister had been left to bury their dead.

But there was one thing of value which Ethel had not parted with, a miniature likeness of what she supposed to have been her mother in her girlhood, and which was really so, and not Mrs. Monte, for it was the likeness of Lola Rutledge, who had died on the gallows.

Twin sisters, they were strangely alike, Lola and Ethel, and Mrs. Monte had given the miniature to Ethel, and it had been sacredly kept by her.

But, with no money to bury the dead, she had given it to her brother to go and get a loan upon, little dreaming how valuable it was, for it was studded with precious stones.

Mark Monte had borrowed enough money on it to buy back the cottage from Ezra Vail, through another party, place a monument over his mother, and then fit up and refurnish their little home, and bitterly did this anger the whaler merchant, who knew not from whence had come the money.

He would never have sold the cottage had he known that Mark Monte was really the buyer, and seeing himself and his sister seemingly above want and not knowing the depth of their purse, he began to plot their ruin, or rather the destruction of the young sailor, and which would thus place Ethel in the clutches of himself and son, thus forcing her to become the coaster's wife.

So it was that he had him arrested as the destroyer of the brig Dart, of which he had gone as mate, and foiled by the return of the captain, who thus saved the young sailor, he yet determined upon another plan to bring ruin and death upon the man who stood between his son and Ethel.

One day, while Mark was a slave to an Arab master in Africa, there had sailed into the harbor of Salem a beautiful brig.

Her arrival was opportune, for Ethel was returning from the town in her skiff, and over-

taken by a storm was capsized, and would have drowned, had not the young captain of the brig sprung into the sea and rescued her.

He gave his name as Malcolm Meredith, and said he was a sailor who owned his vessel, and drifted about the world looking for freights.

He was, in fact, a sailor of fortune, and a dashing fellow, handsome, brave, and dressing with rare taste, he was the very man to win a woman's heart.

His vessel was as trim a craft as had ever dropped anchor in Salem Harbor, and his crew were a splendid lot of men.

He lingered for long weeks in Salem, having lost his heart to the beautiful Ethel, and then sailed to join the whaling fleets, he said, and bring home a cargo of oil.

When the Sea Dove, which was the name of his fine brig, sailed, it carried with it the heart of Ethel Monte, for she had learned to dearly love the handsome young "Dandy Sailor," as Malcolm Meredith was called, and had promised to become his wife upon his return to port.

But months passed away and he came not, and then as the brig on which Mark had sailed had been reported lost with all on board, adversity came upon Cliff Cottage.

But Mark returned as from the grave, and yet Malcolm Meredith remained away.

But strange, wicked rumors were told of how Malcolm Meredith had turned his brig into a pirate, and under her changed name of the Red Dove, she was the bitter foe of the whaling fleet.

These stories Ethel would not believe of her lover; but, as though she must be made to suffer still more, the blow of Ezra Vail was struck, and her brother was arrested for "mutiny, murder, and robbery upon the high seas."

He was accused by Ezra Vail of having wrecked the brig, Dart, with all on board, to get possession of the money which the captain had with him to buy cargoes for Vail & Co., at Mediterranean ports, and, as he had appeared to return home penniless, and then launched forth in seeming extravagance, it appeared as though there was cause for the charge against him, for no one knew how he had raised the money upon the gem-studded gold case of the miniature left to Ethel by Mrs. Monte.

And so Mark was arrested one night and dragged off to prison, and poor Ethel sat bewailing their unhappy lot, when suddenly a visitor appeared at Cliff Cottage.

That visitor was none other than Malcolm Meredith, the commander of what had become known as the pirate brig Red Dove, and whom the whalers had come to dread as their bitterest foe.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DENIAL.

It was indeed Malcolm Meredith that appeared before Ethel Monte, as she sat mourning in the cozy sitting-room of Cliff Cottage after the arrest of her brother Mark upon a charge so appalling.

He had come back to her while the town was ringing with his name as a pirate.

A splendid-looking fellow he was, as he appeared before her there, with the lamplight falling full upon him.

His form was elegant as well as athletic, and his uniform was the perfection of elegance.

His face was fearless, his features perfect, and there rested upon his countenance a look that was very winning, and as light-hearted as a boy he appeared.

A glance showed him that the beautiful girl before him had been weeping, and was in deep distress, and he asked her in a low voice, full of tenderness to tell him of her troubles, adding:

"Could I only believe, Ethel, that you worried for me, that your tears were because I had been so long gone, and you had never heard of me, I would be happy, be repaid for all I had suffered."

She looked at him with a strange expression upon her face and said:

"I have shed bitter tears for you, Captain Meredith, for I have heard, oh! such wicked stories of you."

"Stories of me?" he asked in surprise.

"Yes, I have heard so much that was fearful, and yet I have not, could not believe them."

"Bless you for those words, Ethel; but how you can have heard of me I cannot understand; but tell me of yourself first, your mother, your brother, and all, and then I will tell you of my long stay away from you, and I know you will forgive me when you know all."

She looked into his face with an expression upon her own which he could not fathom, and then said in a voice that quivered:

"You ask of my mother—she is dead."

"Dead?"

"You ask of my brother—he has just been dragged off to prison accused of murder and robbery upon the sea."

"To prison?"

"Yes."

"Your mother dead, your brother in prison?"

"This is fearful, Ethel; but come, sit here and let me know just what it all means."

He drew her to a seat, and then she told her long and bitter story of persecution, death and sorrow.

Now and then he asked a question, and that was all, for he made no comment.

When at last she finished and looked at him, she was fairly startled by his face.

Its sunny look was gone, the lips were firmly set, the eyes seemed to fairly blaze, and the color had faded away leaving him livid-hued.

But he was perfectly calm, and said:

"So Ezra Vail was putting your dying mother out of her home when your brother returned?"

"Yes."

"And he it is that has now arrested Mark for the destruction of his brig?"

"It is."

"The brig's name was the Dart?"

"Yes."

"Sailed from Salem?"

"Yes."

"It had a first mate who was an Arab by the name of Selim?"

"So Mark told me."

"Her captain's name was Hudson?"

"Yes, Captain John Hudson."

"All were lost, you say?"

"So Mark reported, but said he had seen the captain reach the shore, but when the Arabs had been searching the bodies that of Captain Hudson was missing, the waves having carried it back into the sea."

The sailor was silent for some minutes and then said softly:

"My poor Ethel! how you must have suffered; but I am here to protect you now, so all your troubles shall end."

"You! why, Captain Meredith, I tremble now for fear you will be discovered and arrested."

"And why, Ethel?"

"For piracy."

The young sailor laughed.

"Piracy? Do you mean it?"

"Indeed I do."

"I am interested, Ethel, so tell me what you mean?"

"I mean that when you sailed from here you said you were going to join the Salem Whaling fleet."

"I did expect to do so."

"And months after news came that the Red Dove, your vessel—"

"My brig is the Sea Dove, Ethel."

"Well, the name was changed to the Red Dove, and it was reported that you had visited every captain of the fleet, with forged letters from Ezra Vail & Company, and other owners, ordering the skippers to pay you certain sums of money."

The sailor broke out into merry laughter at this, but said:

"Pray go on, Ethel, for I am interested, I assure you."

She could not understand his manner, but continued:

"Then you went back to the fleet captains and raised more money, to again disappear, and when the messenger ship Winged Whale was on her way to the fleet you overhauled her in your brig and forced her captain to give up to you the money he had to pay off the seamen of the whalers with."

Again Captain Malcolm Meredith burst forth in a merry laugh, and though his manner was incomprehensible to Ethel, it yet cheered her in her belief that he was not what he had been reported to be, or he would not make so merry over it.

"Please continue, Ethel, for your story grows in interest."

"The Winged Whale returned and reported all of your acts of outlawry, and then the fleet set sail for home and you headed off the different vessels, again boarded the flag-ship Niagara, under old Captain Isaac Jubal, and was taken prisoner."

"Yet here I am."

"True, but it was reported, by a vessel that just arrived ahead of the fleet, that your brig sailed away, after you had boarded the Niagara and been taken, and in a couple of days what appeared to be a Government cruiser, an armed schooner, came in sight, and hailing the ship, the captain said he had captured the Red Dove and would carry you on in irons to Salem."

"So Captain Jubal gave you up, when the crew of the schooner cheered, you took command and as the pretended cruiser sailed away she changed her rig back into that of the Red Dove."

"Why this is a remarkable narrative, my dear Ethel, and I am the hero of it here in Salem, you say?"

"You are, for your escape is now the town talk, as well as your piracies."

"Do not be severe, Ethel, for a man is innocent in law until he is proven guilty; but you say the brig is called the Red Dove?"

"Yes."

"And her captain bears the name of Meredith?"

"Yes, of Malcolm Meredith."

"It is some daring man masquerading under my name, Ethel."

"But he is said to be your exact image, Malcolm."

"Ah! this is stranger still; but, Ethel, even though appearances are against me, I pledge you my word that I am not guilty of these charges."

"I did sail from here to join the whaling fleet, but met a vessel that turned me off my course. It was a wreck with a valuable cargo, bound to the Mediterranean Sea."

"I took it there, lost my vessel, and have been the prisoner to Moorish corsairs."

"I escaped, made my way to Cuba, had another vessel, the counterpart of my brig, built, and having made some money in certain cargoes, I returned here to explain my long silence and absence to you, and ask you to become my wife."

"Now I return to find you have been most unhappy, and that I bear the name of a pirate."

"Yes, Malcolm, and though I have not doubted you, though I believe there has been some terrible mistake, there is a price set upon your head, and you will be arrested and hanged, so you must not remain here—you must go at once."

"I do not care to be hanged, Ethel; but I never desert those in distress, so I will go that I may serve your brother, yes, and prove that I am innocent of these cruel charges."

"Cheer up, little woman, for I pledge you my word your brother shall not hang, and your lover is not a pirate, you may be sure."

"But I have no desire to be hanged, so will act accordingly," and as there came a knock at the door of the cottage, the sailor quickly entered an adjoining room; but, after seeing her visitor, Ethel went in search of her lover and found that he had mysteriously departed, leaving no reason for his having done so.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RECOGNITION.

WHEN the morning dawned, the vessel of Malcolm Meredith was not seen in the harbor, and the good people of Salem little dreamed that the bitter foe of their whaling fleet had been in their very midst.

Since it was known that the commander of the Red Dove had made his escape, there was much anxiety felt in Salem, all fearing that the noted Rover would run into their harbor and do them some harm.

Had those who were on the wharves the morning after the visit of Malcolm Meredith to Ethel Monte, taken particular notice of a brig that lay at anchor near the upper end of the harbor, they would have noted that she was a stranger, that, under cover of the night, had come into port.

She was a weather-beaten craft, with rusty sails, bluff bows and a high stern, and at her peak floated the English flag.

All was quiet on board, and to a casual observer she looked to be a foreign trader; but a critical examination by a thorough sailor would have developed the fact that she was not what she appeared, but wearing a disguise for some reason best known to her skipper.

A boat put off from her about nine o'clock, and in the stern-sheets sat a gray-bearded, white-haired man in the dress of a sailor, and his two oarsmen looked like the ordinary seamen of a merchant vessel.

Landing at a wharf, the old skipper dismissed his boat, with a few words in a low tone, and walking with a cane, and in an attitude slightly bent, made his way up into the town.

He was so much like a hundred other sea captains in Salem in general appearance, that no one took notice of him, and he made his way about the town undisturbed, halting here and there and apparently taking in the conversation of different groups of men who were discussing the bold piracies of the Red Dove and the escape of her captain.

After several hours spent in the town, in which time he visited the different inns and tap-rooms, he made his way back to where he had landed and made a signal, which soon brought his boat ashore for him.

But, taking the tiller, he headed further up the harbor and not toward his vessel.

After a row of a mile, he landed in a clump of woods on a point, with a hill behind it, and following a path that led inland, while his boat awaited him.

Before long he came upon a small log cabin, built against the steep bank of a hill, and sheltered by pine trees.

It was a lonely, dismal spot, and the habitation was not calculated to inspire one with the idea that hospitable treatment was to be found there.

Upon the front of the cabin were tacked innumerable birds' wings and the skins of a fox, wolf, possum and coon.

Over the door on a nest were three stuffed owls, and suspended from the windows were stuffed snakes.

The door was painted jet-black, and in the center of it was a huge red heart, while a chain of skulls, also painted, but white, surrounded it.

The door was closed, and upon a mat in front lay a huge black dog, which raised his head and

uttered a dismal howl at the sight of the stranger.

At this the door opened and a woman appeared.

Her form was slightly bent, and her face wrinkled, but there were traces about both that showed she had once been well-formed and handsome.

She was dressed in red velvet, with short skirt, and blouse waist, wore innumerable necklaces, and her hair was snow-white.

Her eyes, dark and piercing, seemed to look into one's very soul, and she asked in a voice that was stern and cold:

"Well, old man, what has brought you to the home of Wanda the Witch, for surely your days of love are over, and you care not to have your future told as the young do?"

"I have come, good Wanda, having heard of your powers, to seek your aid in behalf of one in distress."

"Then you have gold to pay?"

"I ask no favors, for I am ready to pay, and— Good God!"

The sailor had been looking straight into the face of the woman, and suddenly came over him a flash of recognition, and he started back with the exclamation which seemed to frighten the woman.

She sprang backward, and her dog uttered a savage growl, as though he believed his weird mistress was in danger.

Then the witch, as she was called, sprang toward the sailor, who seemed deeply moved, and asked in a hoarse voice:

"Man, who are you? Speak—who are you?"

The old sailor quickly recovered himself, and said:

"A stranger to you, good woman, though for a moment I believed I knew you."

"You do know me! Who are you I ask, for your voice has a ring in it that recalls the past to me—a past I would remember, and yet forget—but no, he was young, and you are an old man—unless—"

She sprang upon him so suddenly he could offer no resistance, and, quick as a flash, she tore from his head and face a wig and false beard.

"My God! Malcolm, my son! my son!"

The arms of the woman were thrown about the man, and she seemed overcome with emotion.

He stood erect, and she cried:

"Malcolm, do you not know me?"

"I am your poor old mother, whom you left long ago."

"But I knew you would come back to me; yes, I knew you would."

"You are not my mother, Phoebe Farrar," he at last said, in a low tone.

"What! are you not Malcolm Meredith?"

"I am Malcolm Meredith Mountjoy, and—"

"Ha! why do you call yourself by that name, the name of a man who was hanged?"

"My father!" he said, bitterly, and then continued in his low, earnest way:

"In the long ago I had a belief that you were not my own mother, though certainly you were ever kind and loving toward me."

"In your delirium, when I sat by the side of your bed, you told the whole bitter, cruel story, of my mother and my father."

"I did not tell you that I knew all; but I left you, for I felt that you had wronged my parent in making him believe that I was dead, and it was a cruel wrong to me, too."

"I sent you gold from a foreign land, but the one I bade give it to you returned it to me, saying you had left your home at the Highlands and gone no one knew whither."

"I have cruised about the world, meeting with varied fortunes, and am now here on an important mission, and I sought the aid of Wanda the Witch, and I find in her the one who was my adopted mother, my childhood's nurse, Phoebe Farrar."

"Need I say more to convince you that I know well that no drop of your blood flows in my veins?"

"I need not tell you either that I remember you with affection for your kindness to me in the past, and forgive you all the wrong you did my father and me, and you shall never know want as long as I have a dollar."

"Come now, good Mother. Phoebe, let us be friends, and forgetting the past, look to the future."

He held out his hand to her, and grasping it in both her own she kissed it, while she said:

"You are good to forgive me all, Malcolm; but I had no child and I loved you so."

"Come, overlook the hideous hag I have become, the dreaded witch, and enter my humble home."

Without a word he followed her into the cabin and the door closed behind them.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DOUBLE.

WHEN Malcolm Meredith had taken a seat which Wanda had placed for him, she drew a chair near and said:

"Do not condemn me for being what I am, for I had to live; I needed gold, and witchcraft brings me all I want."

"I condemn nothing, Mother Farrar—"

"Call me Wanda, for I am so known, and you care not to call me mother, while of course you would not wish to be believed to be the child of Wanda the Witch."

"I am believed to be even worse, far worse, for I am called a pirate."

"You are one, are you not?"

"Ah no, not I."

"Yet who is Malcolm Meredith the whalers' Nemesis?"

"Not I."

"I did not see you when you came in as a merchant captain and saved the life of that lovely girl, Ethel Monte."

"That afternoon she had been in the town, running there in her little skiff, and coming upon some boys who were deriding the old Witch Wanda, led me to the shore, and brought me home in the very face of the storm which broke on her ere she reached her home."

"Fortunately you were near and saved her."

"I started when I heard that Malcolm Meredith had saved her from death, and I was glad when she told me you were to come back and make her your wife."

"You sailed away, and then came the stories of your piracies—"

"Not mine."

"Well, some one with your name, and those of the whalers who saw you, or the one who calls himself Malcolm Meredith, said he was the same who had been the one to save Ethel Monte, her lover."

"They were mistaken."

"Well, adversity came upon the maiden and her family, and her mother is dead, her brother now in prison, and she has also the sorrow of believing you, her lover, a pirate."

"I had a brother, did I not, Wanda?"

The woman started at this.

"Yes, a twin brother."

"And his name?"

"Was Mark."

"Are you sure?"

"No, for I did not know either of you apart, but believed you were Malcolm, and so called you."

"But there might have been a mistake?"

"Yes, he might have been Malcolm Meredith Mountjoy and you Mark."

"And where is he?"

"Dead."

"You are sure?"

"Yes."

"What proof have you?"

"He was adopted by a friend of your father, an army officer by the name of Major Herbert Deering—now General Deering—and some of your father's foes kidnapped him and took him to sea; but, the vessel was lost, I heard, and a man with a little boy in his arms was dashed on the coast and buried there."

"And you have heard nothing of my brother since?"

"Not a word."

"Then who is this Malcolm Meredith, the Buccaneer?"

"You say it is not you?"

"I do."

"Strange."

"It is strange; but it is an accident of names I suppose."

"But the resemblance to you."

"Ah! then it must be my twin brother."

"If you are not the whalers' Nemesis, then it is your twin brother who is, and he escaped death."

"Yes, and I am then Mark Meredith."

"That does not follow, for the mistake of a name may have been made in this case too."

"True; but they say his vessel is like mine also."

"Yes, the counterpart of the brig you had here."

"And mine is the Sea Dove."

"He calls his the Red Dove, and from all accounts I guess the name is deserved, for her acts are red ones."

"Well, I must find this Malcolm Meredith, whoever he is and wherever he may be."

"Yes, but beware that you are not mistaken for him, seized and hanged."

"True; but I had my warning of this, so came in the disguise that you tore from me."

"Resume it before you leave this cabin."

"I will."

"And your vessel?"

"Is also disguised and in port."

"Why did you come here?"

"To claim my bride, for I have been long kept away by an unkind destiny."

"Will she marry you, believing you to be a pirate?"

"I think not, I know not, if she so believed me; but ere I ask her to be my wife, I shall prove that I am no pirate."

"A sailor of fortune, I am, yes, and I do not mind telling you, Wanda, that I have made gold as a slaver, running slaves from the coast of Africa to Cuba and Brazil; but I am not a pirate, no, not that."

"But now let us discuss this poor fellow, Monte, who lies in prison."

"You wish to save him?"

"I shall do so," was the confident response,

and after some further conversation together the Witch said:

"I have already arranged a plan for his rescue."

"Well, let me tell you my plan first, and if that fails it will be well enough to rescue him."

"There is on my vessel a poor fellow whom we picked up from a wreck, and whose sufferings and sorrows have turned his brain."

"He has told me his story once and over again, and I have always believed it to be the wandering chatter of a diseased mind."

"But to-night I learned from Ethel Monte that the vessel in which her brother sailed as second mate, was the brig, Dart, owned by Ezra Vail and Company, and that she was lost on the African Coast."

"Also that her first mate was an Arab by the name of Selim, and her captain was a Captain John Hudson, and all were believed to be lost."

"Now this poor fellow I speak of says his name is John Hudson, that he commanded the brig Dart, and was wrecked, and all but himself lost."

"I have heard him speak of Salem, and of Vail and Company, so the man is the one to cast into the teeth of Monte's accusers the lie they have trumped up against him."

"I shall have him at the trial, and I will be there myself in disguise, and the persecution of Mark Monte must stop."

"I am glad to hear this, my son—I mean Malcolm—"

"Nay, good Wanda, don't fear to speak of me as one dear to you, if I still am, for I have forgiven the past, you know."

"God bless you for it, and when you have saved Monte and marry Ethel, you will be happy, I hope— But I forget."

"Forget what?"

"You must first prove you are not Malcolm Meredith, the whalers' Nemesis, or you will never dare show yourself in Salem."

"True, I must do this, and to do so, my brother must be proven a pirate."

"You still believe it is your twin brother?"

"It must be, from all you tell me; but now I must be off, and speak to no one of my coming to you."

"And you will come back again?" wistfully said the woman, for he was as dear to her as though he were really her own son.

"Yes, and I'll never forget you; but you need gold?"

"No, no; I have plenty."

"But you should not, then, lead this weird life!"

"Yes, it is better so—better so. I must remain 'Wanda, the Witch,'" was the reply, and soon after, Malcolm Monte resuming his disguise, left the cabin, and the disguised brig at nightfall sailed out of the harbor of Salem.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EZRA VAIL HAS A GAME TO PLAY.

WHEN the trial of Mark Monte came off Ezra Vail, his son Rupert and their lawyers were astounded to see appear at the last none other than the captain of the brig Dart, which they were trying to prove the young sailor had wrecked purposely to rob.

His mind had come back to him in all its former vigor, and though a mere physical wreck of his former self, for he had become an old man, he was yet known as John Hudson, of the brig Dart, and the story he told made Mark Monte a hero, for the young man had done all in his power to save the vessel and her crew.

Thwarted upon the threshold of the successful termination of their plot, Ezra Vail and Rupert were anxious to do all in their power to make amends.

Who the secret worker in Mark Monte's behalf was no one knew, though the reader can understand that it was Malcolm Meredith, who did not himself dare to openly appear in the matter.

He had gone to the loan-agent, with whom Mark Monte had left the gem-studded miniature and redeemed it, and had sent it to Ethel, whom he had not again visited, wishing first to remove the stigma of piracy from his name; but Mark and Ethel both knew who their friend was in all that had happened.

There was one strange circumstance, however, which neither Wanda, Mark or Ethel could understand.

That was, that while Malcolm Meredith had been in Salem in disguise, there had been nothing heard of the Red Dove's lawless acts.

But as soon as he disappeared, after Mark's escape from the gallows, the incoming vessels reported having been overhauled and gold taken from each captain to ransom his craft from destruction.

As for old John Hudson, he had returned penniless, but there was a sum due him by Ezra Vail & Co. and this they promptly paid.

Then he was told by both Mark and Ethel to make Cliff Cottage his home, for the young sailor said:

"Remember, captain. I owe my life to you, and yet I must ask you to do me another great service, and that is to be as a father to my sister, for I am offered a berth as captain of a

good schooner, so must take it and go to sea, and Ethel will have no protector."

The old man was glad to find such a home, especially when urged by Ethel, and thus matters stood one night when Rupert Vail walked rapidly home through a driving storm and handed his father, who was taking his ease in the library, a package of importance that had just arrived by special messenger, as the office was being closed.

Captain Vail took the sealed package and broke it open.

Then he said:

"Let us have supper now, Rupert, and then I have something to tell you, so I will not read this now."

"The messenger said that it was most important."

"So it is, but he must await my pleasure."

They went into the supper-room, and after the meal was over returned to the library, and in dressing-gowns and slippers made themselves comfortable before the log fire.

"You can close the house, Burton, and go to your quarters, for we will not need you again to-night, after you have placed the handy decanter and cigars at hand."

The butler obeyed, and when they were alone Captain Vail said:

"You know, Rupert, that the aim of my life is to be the richest of men?"

"Yes, father."

"To leave you an inheritance that will dwarf all others."

"So you have often said."

"Now all money-making is but gambling in one sense, for we speculate, risk and do all with the chance of gain."

"In business there are many men who are but pirates upon their fellows, and some grow rich at the sacrifice of others."

"Is this a sermon, father?"

"No, but it leads up to what I intend to tell you."

"I am all intent, for it is not often I hear you philosophize."

"The package brought me to-night came from Justin Laws, my old confidential clerk."

"Now Justin is a deuced rascal, I know; but he serves me well, for he is ambitious and in looking to my interests serves his own."

"I see."

"I did not care to be known in a certain transaction, and so I sent Justin Laws as a stool pigeon."

"He has, I see, made a full report of two matters he had in hand."

"First, he has found out that the estate of Peter Rutledge, murdered, and left by the murderer to her children, very nearly approaches a million dollars now, and this about equals the estate of General Deering, who was the heir of his uncle, General Nevitte, and his aunt, Miss Kittredge, both of whom died unmarried, while he also was left a fortune by his parents."

"Now I have very nearly as much, and with you the owner of the Rutledge riches, through your marriage with Ethel Monte, you will double the wealth of any man in New England, do you see?"

"I will see when I get it; but Ethel is not my wife yet."

"That is the second case I am coming to, for she will be."

"Don't be too sure."

"With her brother in your power she will come to terms."

"Yes, but he is as slippery as an eel—we can never hold him, father."

"Now let us see what Justin says."

"You have then been plotting without letting me into the secret?"

"Yes, for I wished to have the reins well in hand before I acted."

"I see."

"Now, my son," and the old man glared about him as though fearful of an eavesdropper, though he knew no one was near; but it was the old dread of a guilty conscience that makes cowards of us all.

"There is no one near, sir."

"Yes, but see if the servants have retired."

Rupert rose lazily and made the circuit of the halls and adjoining rooms.

"All quiet, father, so out with your secret."

"Well, you know that the Sea Rovers win vast fortunes by their piracies upon the high seas?"

"So they are said to."

"Now all that is wanted is a fleet craft, well armed, manned by a crew of desperate men, and under the command of a man who has no fear of Heaven or Hades."

"Like Malcolm Meredith, this Nemesis of the whalers, for instance."

"Yes, for from my ships alone he has gotten some thirty thousand dollars, and he has robbed many another craft."

"Well, father, what then?"

"I have the very man for a pirate."

"You?"

"I know something of his life, and he is now in jail in Boston awaiting death on the gallows for his lawless work."

"He comes of a good family in Boston, but went to the bad ran away to sea, and return-

ing home believing he was forgotten, was recognized, arrested, tried and sentenced to be hanged."

"He is as brave as a lion, a splendid sailor and the very man for my work."

"Your work, father?"

"Yes."

"I am at sea as regards your meaning."

The old man smiled and replied in a low tone:

"I have bought a vessel, fitted her out as a cruiser, nominally to hunt down this Malcolm Meredith, but in reality to turn her into a pirate for our benefit," and at the words of his father Rupert Vail sprung to his feet with an oath upon his lips.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GAME.

THE oath which Rupert Vail uttered was not one of indignant anger at his father's bold and evil game to be played, but brought to his lips by his intense surprise and real delight.

"Old man, you are worth a dozen of your son."

"You have a great head, and I follow your lead every time."

"I thought that you would, Rupert," returned the old man, really delighted at the praise his son bestowed upon him.

"Now let me hear more sir."

"All right, I'll read Laws's letter, for it is explicit I judge."

"Do so."

The merchant whaler then read aloud as follows:

"ESTEEMED SIR:—

"I flatter myself that I have a good report to make to you of what I have accomplished."

"I found on my arrival in Boston, that the town was giving you just praise for purchasing and fitting out at your own expense, a cruiser to go after the noted pirate Meredith."

"Your papers arrived from the Government, and a commission in blank for you to fill up with the name of the officer you are to place in command of her."

"The schooner is now in perfect repair, not a rope or a sail wanting, and I paid the bill of the builders to-day by draft on you."

"The guns arrived and were put on board, with the small-arms, and she is being provisioned for a six months' cruise."

"I have a good man getting you a crew, and he knows just what kind of men you wish for the work."

"Now to your captain:

"I went, in the disguise of a priest, to visit him in his cell, told him I had terms to offer him, and placed before him the paper containing your proposition to aid him to escape, place him in command of the vessel, and in return he was to serve you as you desired, giving you one-half of all gains, and paying himself, crew and expenses arising out of the other half."

"You asked me to write you my opinion of the man."

"He is about twenty-eight, with a face that is refined and strangely handsome and winning for that of a man who has been the Satan that he has."

"He is a tall, powerful fellow, and would die with a smile on his face if die he had to, but prefers to live and would take desperate chances to do so."

"He accepted your terms, and said he would hold himself ready to depart at a moment's notice."

"I then set about finding a man who looked like him."

"It was no easy job, for he is a picture of manly beauty, and one he resembles to a striking degree, is not the one to ask to represent him, as you may know when I tell you that it is Mark Monte."

"At last, however, I found a person who, with a slight dressing up, would pass muster for him."

"I discovered the fellow to be a sailor, an adventurer, dead broke and a stranger here."

"I found he was ready for work of any kind, so we looked up the law on the punishment he would receive for allowing the prisoner to escape while he remained in his stead."

"He discovered that it would be a year in prison at the least, with chances of more, so he said:

"I am a little run down in health from overliving, and the rest and jail fare would do me good and build me up."

"Then I am young and can afford to give a couple of years of my life, when I know I will get a snug sum when I come out of prison."

"I closed the bargain with him at five thousand, to be deposited in his name in bank to draw interest from date, and told him to study up the Latin prayers and manners of a priest."

"He at once repeated several to me, and said he was up in all prayers, from Catholic to Mahomedan."

"It now remains for me, when I go to the jail, after hearing from you, to take this man with me and introduce him as a priest who will visit the prisoner in my absence."

"He can so disguise himself as not to look like the prisoner, while, when he remains in the cell, the condemned man can come out and never be suspected."

"I will meet him outside and carry him on board the schooner, which can at once sail, so you had best send on the one you intend shall be captain until the craft gets out to sea, for the letter I wrote him from here, offering him the berth on a vessel as skipper, he replied to, accepting it."

"I will have some one meet him and take him on board, and then all will be well."

"I send this by special messenger, and a letter herewith ordering your man to report for duty, so you can send it to him by the one who bears this."

"The night after his arrival, the real commander shall escape from jail."

"You may know that, as I have done all under various disguises, no one will suspect me, so as to dog me back to Salem, and when it is reported that a band of pirates boarded your schooner and ran off with her, you will have the sympathy of the people."

"I hope I have done to please you, for that is my first object, my own interests the second."

"Let me know by messenger just when to expect your captain."

"The letter is unsealed, so you can read it, and it tells him where to report."

"I have the honor to be, sir,

"Your ob't serv't."

"JUSTIN LAWS."

"Well, my son, what do you think of my game?" said Captain Vail, with an air of triumph, when he had finished reading the long letter of his secret agent.

"It is wonderful, sir, wonderful; but who is this man he speaks of as your nominal captain of the schooner?"

In response the old whaler handed to him the letter which Justin Laws had inclosed.

"Ah! I see you are as deep as the sea, my dear father."

"But see if I understand all correctly."

"Well?"

"You have bought this schooner—"

"Yes, the slave schooner Blackbird, captured a short while ago by an American cruiser."

"Ah! she is said to possess marvelous speed."

"She does, and would not have been taken but for a shot that carried away her mainmast."

"I bought her, improved her to my liking, and she is ready for sea."

"You get the credit of fitting her out as a pirate-hunter?"

"I do."

"And then it is to be supposed lawless men cut her out before you got your captain and crew on board, and you lose your vessel?"

"That is it."

"And yet she is to go under a captain of your own selection, this jail-bird, and turn pirate, and you get half the money she earns?"

"I do."

"Can you trust him?"

"I must; and after saving him from the gallows, and giving him a fair chance, he will hardly fail me."

"I hope not, and should think not; but there is another in the case."

"Yes."

"I see it all now, father, and I offer you my warmest congratulations."

"You are a great man," and Rupert Vail grasped his father's hand warmly, and then the two drank to the success of the Blackbird under her convict captain.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CONVICT CAPTAIN.

IN a cell in the Boston prison, strongly guarded without, and with iron manacles upon his left ankle, clanking at every move to constantly remind him of their galling presence, sat a man, gazing out of the grated window upon the scene spread out before him.

He was a man of striking presence, erect as a soldier when he stood up and cast his eyes over the varied view that met his vision, and in his face there was a look that certainly belied him as a criminal, so tender it was.

To have been in an assemblage of a thousand men, where a reader of human nature was to pick out a murderer and villain, Burt Brentford, the man in the cell, would have been the very last one who would have been selected.

And yet he was a man who had lived a wild life, forged his father's name to get money to carry on his dissipation and gambling, and when discovered, and an officer came to his luxurious rooms to arrest him, had shot him down in his tracks and made his escape, taking possession of a friend's yacht to depart in from the harbor.

For years he had not been heard of, and then he returned, grown from the beardless, slender youth of twenty-one into the bearded, splendidly formed man of twenty-eight.

He had trusted to the years that had passed and the change in his personal appearance not to be recognized, and yet had daringly gone to his father's house to ask money of him.

Judge Brentford was a stern old Roman, with the highest sense of honor and justice, and he had at once had his son arrested and given over to the law.

His trial followed, for the murder of the constable, and it was his father who had passed the death sentence upon him.

Such was Burt Brentford, who sat in his cell gazing with a look of strict unconcern out upon the bay, and with but two weeks separating him from his appalling doom.

The harbor of Boston, with its island-dotted bay stretching away to the sea, the green hills on either shore, and the busy town near at hand met his view and seemed to charm the prisoner with its beauty, for he was so wrapt up in it, that he failed to hear the opening of his door, until with an unmistakable Irish accent came the words:

"The good father, sorr, is afther being wid me to pray for yez sinful sowl."

It was the keeper of that tier of cells, and with him was a man in priestly garb.

"Well, Pat, I'll leave my pocket-money with the father to pray your soul out of Purgatory when you die, for I've seen too much of you

here to care to meet you there," was the reckless reply, and the Irish keeper crossed himself piously, with a look of horror on his face, while he muttered:

"Howly Moses, do yez moind him?"

The priest, a man whose work was sanctified to a degree, entered the cell, and was left alone with the prisoner.

"Well," said the prisoner, as the visitor came over to the window.

"That's just what it is, for all is well," was the reply, in the same low tone, and then, as the steps of the keeper were heard retreating along the corridor, he continued:

"I call with my assistant to-night, reporting at the office as I go out, that I am called away from town."

"And then?"

"He comes to-morrow night alone, and will take your place here."

"All right; and I walk out?"

"You do."

"Do we look enough alike for the cheat not to be recognized?"

"You do."

"That Irish guard will kill him when he discovers the cheat," and Burt Brentford laughed as though really amused.

"That is his lookout."

"Yes, he must take the chances; but I am to walk out of the jail, and then?"

"Go down to the East Indian wharf and I'll be there with a boat."

"To carry me aboard ship?"

"Yes."

"And I am to take command?"

"You are to be *second* in command."

"I thought I was to be captain."

"You are, after you get out to sea."

"Ah!"

"I will hand you a letter of instructions, which you are to open and read, and then act."

"I understand; but the crew?"

"Are aware that there will be a change; but you are to manage them."

"I will do it, for I am master or nothing."

"But then?"

"You are to go on your cruise."

"Under any particular flag?"

"One of your own selection, so that you do not choose one of some nation."

"I understand; and then?"

"Your letter of instructions will tell you everything; but I have your pledge to carry them out?"

"To the letter."

"Remember, you are saved from the gallows."

"I shall not forget it, sir."

"You are placed in command of a fine, fleet vessel, fully armed and manned."

"Yes, I appreciate it."

"And are thus given the chance to make your living, and in return are to share equally with the one for whom I act."

"Yourself."

"I did not say so."

"A man is not doing what you have for another—men are not so unselfish."

"Granted that I serve myself, you need not care who I serve, so you are set free and benefited."

"I do not."

"The letter of instructions will give you the address of one who will take your booty to dispose of, so you will have only to send a messenger to him, and he will appoint a rendezvous where to meet you."

"I understand; but to this man who remains in my place?"

"He accepts the result."

"For so much gold?"

"Yes."

"Well, he knows best, but as he serves himself he deserves no thanks from me; but how am I to communicate with you, when I wish to?"

"There is no need of doing so; but, should occasion arise, a letter addressed to 'The Unknown,' left with the agent who disposes of your booty will reach me, and should I desire to respond, I will leave a letter with him for you."

"Not under my name, you know, for I sink that for my father's and sister's sake."

"It would not look well to have a judge on the bench have his name made famous because he was so unfortunate as to have a pirate son," and the man spoke with a bitterness that changed his sad face to a look that was startling to the pretended priest.

"You are right. But what name will you take?"

"Let me see: How will Beelzebub, the Butcher, do?"

"I don't doubt but that it will be a very appropriate name for you; but may I suggest one?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Monte, *The Marauder*!"

"Good! I'll adopt it, so address me as such; but what is the schooner's name?"

"She was the slaver *Blackbird*."

"I'll keep the name."

"Now, let me ask you to do me a favor."

"Certainly."

"I will write a letter to give to you to-night, when you come with that fool who sells his freedom for gold."

"When I have sailed, see that my letter reaches the hands of the one to whom it is addressed—my sister."

"I will do so."

"Thank you," and the prisoner turned to the window as though he wished to be alone, and taking the hint, the pretended priest departed.

CHAPTER XXI.

ANOTHER VENTURE.

It was a pleasant scene to look in upon, there in the cozy sitting-room of Cliff Cottage, for there sat an old sailor with white hair—John Hudson—who had appeared at such an opportune moment to prove that Mark Monte, the young mate of the brig *Dart*, had not wrecked her, or been a mutineer, as he had been charged with being by Vail & Co.

And Mark Monte was there, too, a handsome fellow, with a fearless face, with the form of an Adonis and athlete combined.

He was seated near his beautiful sister, Ethel, whose happiness at her brother's escape from an ignominious death, would have had no alloy, had her lover, Malcolm Meredith, then been from under the ban cast upon him.

"You are determined then, Mark, to make me live here at Cliff Cottage?" said the old captain, with the look of one who felt pleasure in the thought.

"Yes, indeed, sir, for you are our adopted father now, and must be Ethel's protector when I am away."

"You have been a sailor for fifty years, and have passed your three-score years of life, so rest in your old age here, as you have no children or near kindred ties to call you elsewhere."

"I owe you my life, and you have an income for your ordinary wants, or I should insist upon sharing my pay equally with you."

"You urge so well, Mark, I must yield."

"It is well you surrender, Uncle Hudson, for so I shall call you now, before I opened fire upon you and forced you to yield, for this is your home, remember," said Ethel.

"I haul down my flag then, and say no more; but it is because I love you both so well, and not that I feel you are serving me."

"I loved you as a son, Mark, when you were my second mate on the *Dart*, and I had an idea that the Arab first mate, Vail's pet, was not friendly to you; but I could not see why, and so said nothing."

"I believe he wrecked the brig for some motive of his own; but you must not say that you owe your life to me, for it is to that splendid fellow, Meredith, as he had saved me from death, and heard my ravings and knew who I was, so put it to good use when he discovered you were to be hanged for the destruction of the brig."

"He came on board his vessel and had a long talk with me, leading my clouded mind back to all that had happened, and it flashed upon me like sunlight that I was once more myself."

"Now, to him you owe your gratitude, not to me."

"And you say he is not the lawless rover he is accused of being?" said Mark.

"No, indeed. I know he is not; but candidly, while I was on board his vessel I was childish, half-demented from all my sufferings, and could swear to nothing that then happened."

"It seemed like a dream to me, from the day he took me half-dead from the wreck; but he is no pirate, I am sure—he could not be."

"I am so glad to hear you say so much, Hudson," said Ethel, earnestly.

"I have been too falsely accused myself, not to feel that he can also be wronged, so give him the benefit of the doubt; but it is a most remarkable thing that there could be two men of the same name, two vessels alike, both capable of disguising themselves from brig to schooner, and that his movements can only be accounted for by his own word."

"It is strange, but for his sake, for my sister's, I will believe him to be wronged until guilt is proven upon him," and Mark Monte spoke with real feeling.

"Thank you, brother, and I too will not doubt him."

"But where is he?" asked Captain Hudson.

"That question no one can answer, and I would be so glad to know, that I might seek him ere I departed on my cruise."

"And when must you go, Mark?" asked Ethel, with some anxiety, for she dreaded, after all that had happened in the past to see her brother go, though she felt she had a protector in Captain Hudson.

"I was told that I need not come on until the vessel was ready to sail, as my officers will look to all matters for me, and the vessel will be in perfect trim."

"And you go to the West Indies?" asked Captain Hudson.

"I think so; but here is my letter," and taking from his pocket a letter he read aloud as follows:

"CAPTAIN MARK MONTE:—

"MY DEAR SIR:—After offering my congratulations upon your escape from the death that stared you in the face, I beg to say that as an old friend

of your late father, I am anxious to extend you a helping hand now, as I believe, in your time of need."

"I also know that in doing so, I serve myself, as you are the very man to command a vessel I am fitting out for a voyage to the Southern Seas, and which goes on a special mission, as the Government has given me authority to arm and man her thoroughly."

"Your instructions will be given you upon your arrival in Boston, but you need not come on until you again hear from me, for I shall have all in readiness for you."

"Trusting that your troubles are over, I am

"Your obedient servant,

"FORD BURTON."

"It is a kind letter, Mark, and I too hope our troubles are at an end; but do you remember ever to have heard of him?"

"No, I do not; but he is doubtless some large merchant of Boston; but it is time for the coach to be in, and I'll go up to the town and see if there are any letters," and Mark Monte left the cottage, but within the hour was back again.

"I have a letter in the same handwriting, Ethel, so we will know when I have to depart," he said, and breaking the seal he read aloud to his sister and old Captain Hudson a second letter from his kind correspondent, Ford Burton.

It told him to come upon the second day, as the vessel was to sail on Friday, and that his employer would meet him at the Commonwealth Inn, where he was to go and await him.

"Oh, Mark, I do so dread to see you go," said Ethel, with tears in her beautiful eyes.

"You are nervous, my sister, after all you have passed through; but Uncle Hudson will be here to protect you, and the faithful old servants in the kitchen are devoted to you, so there will be no more to fear."

"I'll arrange to have my pay sent you each month, for my wants will be few and a small sum will do me, so you can lay up a snug little sum by my return."

"And suppose Captain Meredith should come?" asked Ethel, anxiously.

"Tell him, for your sake, to prove that he is not the man he is accused of being, and when he does so all will be well."

The next day Mark Monte made his preparations for his departure to Boston, and the outgoing stage carried him away from his little home and all he held dear to again dare the dangers of the deep.

But in his brave heart there was no dread of coming evil.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR VISITOR.

MEN who guard a fellow-being condemned to die, are not hardened in heart as many believe them to be.

Their duty calls them to obey the law, and they must obey the call.

Then there is a certain pride in doing their duty, for upon them rests the responsibility of the safety of a prisoner.

But outside of their duty most keepers of convicts and men under sentence of death, are kind indeed to the unfortunate ones under their charge.

So it was with those who held watch and ward over the young aristocrat, Burt Brentford, whose crimes had brought him under the shadow of the gallows.

His keepers forgot his sins under the fate that was before him, and they spoke to him in a kindly way and did all in their power to make his last days on earth comfortable at least.

He was ever courtly in his manner toward them, he sang a good song and entertained the night-watch during the long hours of the night, and then his indomitable pluck in the face of an ignominious death won their admiration.

At first he had scoffed at the idea of his allowing a clergyman to visit him, and had sternly refused to receive the pastor of his father's church, who had been his spiritual adviser through his boyhood.

But one day he had relented, at Pat's earnest entreaties and had admitted a priest.

Pat the keeper had spoken of this priest as a missionary, and whose only object was to do good to his fellow-men, and he said that he had been most kind to him, and even had visited him at his humble home.

So the priest was admitted to the cell, and there is no reason to say that it was a man sailing under false colors, who had borrowed the plumage of the church to serve the devil in.

If Burt Brentford was anxious regarding the plot that had been formed for his escape, his face did not show it, as he sat in his cell.

His countenance was as placid as though he was at peace with the world and his fellow-man.

He knew that his days were numbered, and yet he intended to meet his fearful fate, if meet it he must, without a tremor of his wonderful nerves.

An hour after the departure of the pretended priest, Pat ushered into his cell unannounced a female form.

He thought if he told the prisoner that a lady wished to see him, she would be refused admission, and as she slipped into his hand a gold-piece, he took the chances of offending the pris-

oner, and so said, as he threw open the cell door:

"A lady to say you, Mistur Brentford."

The door banged to and the visitor was within the cell.

Burt Brentford turned quickly, an angry flash in his eyes; but he saw a form clothed in deep black and a veiled face.

He bowed and asked coldly:

"May I ask if there is not some mistake, madam, for I am receiving no visitors?"

She made no reply, but stood before him, her whole form quivering.

"I am Burt Brentford, murderer, and under sentence of death."

"May I ask if it is I whom you wish to see, madam?"

"Burt! I am Beatrice."

The words were spoken in a low tone, but he started, for he heard and understood.

He stepped quickly toward her, but the clanking iron checked him, and he uttered a deep oath, while reaching forward he dragged from the face the veil that concealed it.

"Yes, you are Beatrice! but in Heaven's name, why came you here?"

"As your wife, it was my duty to come."

He laughed bitterly, but said:

"I know not how you found me out, but it is useless to deny now that I am not the one you think, for I am Burton Brentford, and the name you knew me under, that of Burt Brenton, was a false one."

"It is the name you married me under, Burt, years ago."

The face of the woman was sad, yet lovely, and her beautiful eyes were filled with tears, while her lips quivered.

The man frowned and bit his lips; but said:

"I did deceive you, Beatrice; but I loved you, and you were but a poor girl, and my proud father would never have acknowledged you."

"He would have cast me off forever."

"So I married you, pretending to be Burt Brenton, and a sailor."

"I did expect to one day come back for you, when I told you I was going on a long voyage to China; but I lost heavily at cards, on my return to Boston, and forged my father's name to help me out of debt."

"It was discovered, and I shot the constable who came to arrest me; but I was mad with drink, and knew not what I did until the deed was done."

"Then, in horror at my act, I fled, and went from bad to worse."

"I returned home, hoping my father would give me money to buy a ship and become an honest skipper."

"Instead, he had me arrested, and here I am."

"Now you know me as I am, Beatrice."

"Yes, Burt, and I love you still."

"Even though under sentence of death on the gallows?"

"Oh, yes, I love you more because you are in sorrow and danger."

"You are a noble little woman, Beatrice; but let me tell you that you will gain nothing from my death, for I am dishonored, disowned, and cast off by my father."

"Burt, do you believe that I could have such a thought—of gain through your death?"

"The world does not know me as your wife, but for the sake of one other I sought you—"

"And how did you find me, may I ask?"

"I heard nothing of you, so came to Boston to seek you."

"I found that you had not sailed upon the vessel you said you would go to China on, and for the first time I doubted you."

"Last summer your father and sister came to the little inn kept by my father up in the mountains, and it seemed to me that I had seen them both before."

"Your sister and I became fast friends, although she is seven years younger, and we were won to walk and drive together."

"One day she told me of her brother, and how he had sinned, but said she would ever love him, for she believed your heart was not bad."

"She had a miniature of you, and showed it to me."

"Fortunately her father called her, or I would have betrayed all, for I recognized you at once; but I did not betray you to her."

"I then looked over a sealed package you had left, as by accident, and it contained letters and papers of importance bearing your name."

"Then I knew who it was that had married me; but I let all others believe you had been lost at sea, as I had told them upon my return from Boston when I discovered you had not gone to China."

"A few days ago I saw in a paper your name, and what your awful fate was to be."

"I came at once to try and rescue you, for I inherited a small fortune from an aunt, Burt, so am not poor."

"But I could do nothing though I offered large sums to bribe your keepers."

"Then I determined to see you, Burt, and to remain by you to the bitter end."

"You are a brave, noble woman, Beatrice, and may Heaven bless you; but who was that other you spoke of just now?"

"Burt, it was your son—our child."

"Great God!" and the iron nerve of the strong man was shaken, and sinking upon his cot he buried his face in his hands while his whole form shook with emotion.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CONVICT'S PLEDGE.

It was some moments before the man, strong as he was, and indifferent as he had proven himself in the face of death, could control himself, so deep was his emotion at what he had heard.

"A child, you say, Beatrice, our child?"

"Yes, a little Mr. Burt, and oh! he is so like you—a perfect miniature in face and form of you, my husband."

"I had not known this, Beatrice," he said after a moment of silence.

"You deserted me, Burt, after we had been but two months married, and have never cared to come to me since," she said softly, and yet there was no reproach in her voice or look.

"True, I did all that was mean—somehow I am a great scamp, Beatrice."

"No, no, I will not say that, Burt, for if you were wholly bad I would not love you in spite of all that I had to forgive."

"Bless you, little woman; but how beautiful you have grown."

"You were pretty then, and a mere child; but you are beautiful now."

Her face flushed with pleasure at the compliment, which was really deserved, and then she said sadly:

"But, Burt, can nothing be done to free you from this awful fate that threatens you?"

"You think of me, Beatrice, and not of yourself and child?"

"I told you, Burt, I was not poor now, and little Burt and his mother will not suffer; but I do wish you would acknowledge me as your wife, so that your son could bear his father's name."

"My name, clouded in infamy, a name that is stained with the brand of murderer and convict."

"Still we are not ashamed to bear it, Burt, your son and I."

The man trembled at her words, and turned to the window.

There he remained for several minutes, and then said with deep earnestness:

"Beatrice, your coming here, your beautiful nature, and what you have told me of our boy, has made a changed man of me."

"I believed myself hated and feared by all, loved by none, for even my beautiful sister has not been near me in my distress."

"I now know you in all your truth and love, Beatrice, and I wish to live for you and our boy."

"And Beatrice, my wife, I—"

and he drew nearer to her and whispered the words:

"I will live!—I will not die on the gallows, and this I pledge you, as I also pledge you my word, that I will live for you and my son, and as soon as I can make a home, to be all our own. I will send for you and we will be happy, oh so happy far from here."

"Do you believe me, my wife?"

She was amazed, startled and rejoiced by his words.

Could he mean them? Could it be that he would not die after all?

What did he mean?

Her answer was said in a low tone, and her emotion she could not control.

"If I could only believe that you would not die, that you would live and all would be as you say, Burt."

"I have given you my word, Beatrice, my pledge."

"More I cannot say, but I am not one to die like a dog when life is before me, and a bold act will let me live."

"I can tell you no more, I can only say that it will be as I say."

"I will not be strangled to death, for I will escape, and I will go far from here and earn money to build up a home for you and my boy."

"Trust me, and I ask no more."

"But I have money in bank, Burt, and the sale of the old inn which father left me will bring more."

"I am not the man to live on your gold, Beatrice, so I will earn more, and match your little fortune with one of my own."

"It may be a long time, a year or more, but I will write you, and you will in the end be paid for all you have suffered at my hands."

"It is better to still keep our secret, for I will be a hunted man and cannot live under my name, and if you were known as my wife and left home, you would be followed."

"Let all remain as it is now, as it has been, Beatrice, and in good time I will send for you."

"Will you trust me in this, my wife?"

"Gladly, Burt; but I dread that you may not escape, for how can you?"

"No fear of that, for all is now arranged."

"Heaven grant there be no failure, for it would kill me to have you die such a death."

"No fear of it, my dear Beatrice, for my plans are too well laid and they cannot fail."

"No, you will hear of my escape soon, and I

suppose you will also hear many evil rumors regarding me, that I have turned pirate and all that is bad."

"But believe nothing, only wait until you see me, for I am going away to seek a fortune for us, and already are my plans for the future arranged, though now I can tell you nothing of them."

"I only ask your perfect trust in me, Beatrice."

"And I give it, Burt," was the reply.

Soon after the wife who had borne so much from the man who had made her his wife under a false name, bade him good-by, and somehow his hope set her heart at rest in its dread and she believed firmly in his being able to escape.

Left alone Burt Brentford paced his cell to and fro, his manacled ankle seemingly forgotten, and the clanking chains as he moved seemed not to be heard by him.

His face was set and stern, his eyes bright as diamonds, as though full of hope for the future.

Suddenly he approached the window and leaning upon the sill gazed out upon the scene before him.

It was as though his thoughts were not with him there, for he seemed not even to see the island-studded water of the bay, or the vessels at anchor in it, or cruising about going in and going out upon their varied missions.

"Yes, I have something to live for now, and my heart is not as gloomy and black as it was."

"She is my wife, and true as steel, and the little boy, how I would love to see his innocent face."

"I am poor, but when I leave this loathsome cell, I will have the means to make a fortune at my command."

"I will not tell her that I won my fortune under a rover's flag; but, I must have gold, and as soon as I get enough for my wants, I will give up the wild, reckless, wicked life and live for those whom I love."

"I can find a hiding-place far from here, and haunting specters of the past will not visit me there."

"No, I have something to live for now, and Heaven grant that this well-planned plot of my strange, unknown rescuer does not fail— Ah, Pat, you are a frequent visitor to-day," and the convict turned as the door of his cell opened, and Pat appeared.

"A lady to see you, sir!"

"I just saw a lady, as you know."

"Yes, sir."

"Is it the same one?"

"No, sir, but she do be clothed in black jist the same, sur."

"I do not care to see her, Pat."

"I'll be afther saying that same to her, sur."

"Do so," and Pat departed, while the brow of the prisoner clouded, and he turned again to the window and his interrupted reveries.

But in a few moments the door again opened, and Pat said:

"She told me to say, sur, that it was Estelle as wanted to see yez, sur."

"Estelle, my— Yes, yes, I will see her, Pat, so bid her enter; and here, Pat, put this in your pocket for your little ones, and let no one disturb me while the—the lady is here."

"Do you understand?"

Pat's wink was as expressive as words that he did understand, or thought he did, and he departed, muttering to himself:

"Well, well, how the ladies do be afther running after a man as is going to be hanged; in-dade and they be queer cr'atures is the wimmins!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE THUNDER-STORM.

THE stage to Boston on the Salem road drew up on time at the ferry across an arm of the sea, and just as the clumsy boat was about to push off, a lady and gentleman on horseback dashed up and called the ferryman to take them on board.

Under ordinary circumstances, the ferryman would have had them await his return trip, but a storm was sweeping up, and upon the shore they were leaving there was no house or shelter near, while there was upon the further side of the inlet a small hamlet.

So the ferryman put back the dozen yards to the shore, and took them on board.

Perhaps, too, he was swayed by their appearance, which indicated a special fee for his kindness, and then, too, the beauty of the lady aided him in his decision.

She was very lovely in face, scarcely over eighteen, and her form was the perfection of grace, while she sat in her saddle with the skill of a perfect horsewoman.

Her companion was an elderly gentleman, with smooth-shaven face, long white hair and a look that was stern and resolute in the extreme.

That they were people of refinement and wealth there could be no doubt, and their spirited thoroughbred horses looked as though they had been ridden hard.

The ferrymen were using their huge sweeps with a will, and sending the cumbersome boat along at as rapid rate as possible, when a vivid flash of lightning seemed to rend the heavens in

twain, and a crash of thunder followed that shook the earth.

Instantly all was confusion, for the steady-going stage-horses were frightened, and the spirited animal ridden by the maiden reared wildly, poised himself for an instant, and then, amid cries of alarm, went backward over the low rail of the ferry-boat into the waters, carrying his beautiful rider with him.

Hardly had he disappeared beneath the now rough waters, when from the box of the coach sprung a man's form, and also sunk from sight.

It was a moment of appalling suspense, for the winds rushed down the inlet, lashing the waters into foam, the thunder and lightning were continuous, and the driver and several passengers had all they could do to hold the frightened stage-horses, for if they plunged over the side the boat would swamp and all be lost.

The two men at the sweeps pulled like giants to save the rocking, tossing boat, and several lady passengers in the coach were crying out with fear and wailing piteously.

The old gentleman, the escort of the young horsewoman, had sprung from his saddle to leap after her, though the words that came from his lips showed how mad the act, for he cried in a voice of anguish:

"She is lost, and I can but die with her, for I cannot swim a stroke!"

A passenger seized him and said:

"No; that young man will save her."

"He's just the one to do it."

Just then the maiden reappeared, and it was seen that her horse was dragging her, for her foot was fast in the stirrup.

But by her side almost appeared the brave rescuer, and seizing the stirrup strap he broke it with one mighty effort, and encircling the slender wrist of the young girl, said in a voice that was perfectly calm:

"Have no fear, for you are in no danger, madam."

"No danger!" gasped the young girl, as she beheld the inky clouds riven by constant lightning, heard the thunder-peals that were deafening, and felt the waters dashed in her face by the sweeping winds with a force that stung her.

Then too the waves were dashing wildly, though in miniature imitation of the sea in anger, and the ferry-boat, in spite of the efforts of the men at the sweeps to steady it and head the tempest, seemed to be driving further and further away.

All this the maiden beheld at a glance.

Then she looked up into the face of the man who had dared come to her rescue.

She saw that he was one who had attracted her attention before she rode upon the ferry, for she had seen him speak to the ferryman, as though to tell him to return for them.

Then she caught his eye twice, and noted in her quick glance that he was very handsome and possessed a splendid form, while he wore the dress of a sailor.

And he it was who had come to her aid.

Now as she looked up into his face, at his words that she was in no danger, she saw that there was not the shadow of anxiety in it, only conscious power to prove his words.

He held her firmly with his left arm, and with a strong, bold stroke swam toward the ferry-boat.

"It is going from us! see! see!" cried the young girl.

"The wind drives it along, the coach serving as a sail; but if we cannot catch it, we can reach the shore," was the quiet reply.

"But it is so far away, and you are mortal, so could not reach there with me—save yourself sir, and leave me."

"Not I, for it is not my nature."

"I will save you, for I never yet tired of swimming," was the firm response, and somehow she felt perfect confidence in his words.

Then she said:

"Ah! the boat will be lost! it will drive out to sea!"

"My poor, poor father!"

"The boat must head for the shore and not wait for us, or she will swamp"—and raising his voice, and his words rung out like a bugle, he cried:

"Ho, the boat!"

"Ay, ay, we are trying to wait for you, but she will drive!" came reply in the voice of the man who had prevented the old gentleman from leaping after his daughter, and who had now taken one of the sweeps with the air of a man who knew what he was about.

"Do not wait for us! the boat will swamp, so pull for the shore."

"And you will—"

"Never fear, we can reach it all right!"

"Do as I tell you, or you will all go down, for the sea is increasing."

There seemed to be some confusion on the boat for a minute, but the horses had been hopped and thrown down, and with the male passengers now aiding at the sweeps, and the man who had answered the bold swimmer's hail having rigged a third sweep to steer by, the ferry wore round securely, and in spite of her rolling heavily began to move toward the shore.

As fast as they could the three ladies, now

frightened into action, bailed out the water, as the waves broke inboard, and all worked hard except one person.

That one was the old horseman, and he had climbed upon the stage-box and clung there, gazing out over the wild waters at the dark forms which now and then would appear on the tops of the waves.

His lips moved, as though in prayer, his hat had blown off, and his long white hair floated out upon the wind.

Presenting a small space to the wind, the daring swimmer and his fair charge were not blown along with the speed that the boat was, and were edging nearer and nearer to the shore toward a point which the ferry had already passed, and once under the lee of it, the great danger would be over.

Thus several minutes of awful suspense passed away, and the ferry reached the lee of the point, which, but for the command of the swimmer it would never have done, for the waves, rising higher and higher, would have swamped it.

A landing was made, the horses unbound and the coach dragged ashore, for it could be driven from there back into the high-road a mile above at the little village.

The moment he could spring ashore the old gentleman ran along the point where he could see the swimmer and the one whose life was in his hands.

Others followed and the group stood watching the two forms in the water.

"Noble! noble man!" broke from the old gentleman's lips.

"I never saw a man swim like that, and I've followed the sea for twenty years," remarked the man who had proved himself so useful on the ferry-boat.

"Is the girl dead?" asked some thoughtless one in the group, and instantly rung out the cry:

"My child! my child! is she dead?"

"No, father, and in no danger," came clearly back in response, and a cheer broke from all in the group at her words, for they showed that her preserver was yet swimming strong and untiringly.

Nearer and nearer they came, and then in torrents the rain came down, blinding all who faced it, and forcing all into the coach, which just then drove up, except the old gentleman and the sailor.

"Will not this blind him, sir, and cause him to lose his way, for I cannot see ten paces?" anxiously asked the horseman.

"I'll give him a hail, sir, for it is worrisome," and in thunder tones he shouted:

"Ho, shipmate, this way! this way for the shore!"

But no answer came to the sailor's call.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BOLD RESCUER.

WHEN the sheets of water came down the swimmer was forced to turn his face from the cutting rain, and for a moment seemed dazed.

Twice he swam about at random, and then said:

"I have it now, for the rain comes from the direction of the shore, and is a counter current beating against the wind down the inlet."

"We are all right now," and he struck out once more as strongly as ever.

The young girl had been forced to bury her head upon his shoulder, to avoid the stinging downpour, but she saw that her preserver was at fault, and her heart sunk within her, to beat joyously again, when he so confidently set out with the same strong stroke as before, but having changed his hold upon her to his right arm.

The patter of the rain prevented the voice of the sailor on the point from reaching them when he first hailed:

But louder and louder rung his voice, while some cried in horror:

"They are lost! at last he gave it up!"

Again the sailor hailed:

"Ahoy! shipmate, ahoy!"

"Hark!" cried the young girl.

"Some one calls!"

The swimmer had also heard, and said:

"We are right, for the shore is yonder, and they hail to guide us."

Then he called out:

"Ay, ay, sir—all safe!"

The cheer that answered reached the ears of the two in the waters, and the swimmer swam on with stronger, fiercer strokes.

"Oh, that I could help you! You are failing, sir, so let me go and save yourself," entreated the girl.

The answer came almost fiercely:

"No; I save you, or die with you."

"But you can aid me; here, cling to my shoulders, a hand on each, and I can use both arms."

"There, that is it, and you are a brave little woman."

She noticed that his breath came quick, and yet she showed perfect coolness.

She would not drag him down by losing her presence of mind.

So he swam on bravely, but his strokes were

weakening, and he asked her to hail, for he dared not raise his voice.

"Ahoy! ahoy!" rung out in the clear tones of the girl.

The answer was a cheer close at hand, and in the next instant the group on the point was seen, looking like shadows through the pouring rain.

It gave the splendid swimmer courage, and a moment after his feet touched the bottom and with his arm about the girl he had saved, he tottered ashore.

To her father's arms the maiden clung with a glad cry, for her nerve was gone now, and the rescuer would have fallen but for the strong arm of the sailor who had grasped him by the arm and said quickly:

"Shipmate, drink this," and a flask was held to his lips.

A deep draught revived the swimmer after a moment, and he was aided into the coach, just as the old gentleman and his daughter came up.

The former did not dare trust himself to speak, so merely grasped the hand of the young man, while the man with the flask said:

"A pull at this, miss, will help you, and the old gent, too, for you both needs it, and this bold young feller has set you the example."

The invitation was accepted, for the two did need it, and the horse of the old gentleman having been hitched behind, for the animal ridden by the maiden had been drowned, the coach rolled on to the village, where it was intended to make a stop.

But as all were wet through and through, and the rain still fell in torrents, it was decided to drive on to Boston with all speed, and on the way to the inn the coach stopped at an elegant house to leave the old gentleman and his daughter.

"My name is Brentford, sir, Judge Burton Brentford, and may I ask if you will accept my hospitality?" the old man had said to the rescuer of his daughter.

"Thank you, sir, but I will sail at once from port," was the answer.

"You will surely permit me to call upon you this evening, sir, for I am anxious to have a talk with you, that we may become better friends."

"I am sorry, Judge Brentford, but the owner of my vessel is to meet me, and I expect to have to go at once on board ship and sail on a long cruise."

"You will at least let me know the name of my brave rescuer?" said Estelle Brentford in a low tone.

"Mark Monte. I trust you will feel no evil effects from your adventure, Miss Brentford," and before more could be said the coach rolled away, and Mark Monte was seen in his room in the Commonwealth Inn, whither his kit had been sent, so that he could change his wet clothing for dry.

So prompt had been the young sailor in obeying his summons to Boston, that he had arrived before he was expected by his employer, and so had to wait at the inn until the latter should call.

He asked a few questions regarding his correspondent, Ford Burton, but those he inquired of knew nothing of a shipping merchant of that name.

That evening, as he sat in his room, the name of Judge Brentford was brought up.

"Tell him I am out," said Mark, not caring to see his visitor.

"The landlord has already told him you were in, sir," replied the servant.

"All right, ask the gentleman to please walk up to my room," and five minutes after Judge Brentford entered the room.

"My dear Mr. Monte, I am rejoiced that I found you, and you must pardon my forcing myself upon you, but remember what my home would have been to-night but for your matchless courage!" and the voice of the old man quivered.

"I assure you, sir; I did only what duty prompted, and being a sailor it was not much to do."

"You are modest, sir; but you saved my child to me, and just now it comes upon me with tenfold gratitude, for I suppose you know the dishonor that has fallen upon my name, that my poor boy is to die, die on the gallows, and it was my duty to pronounce upon him the sentence of death."

"I did not know it, sir, though now I recall the trial, and you have my deepest, heartfelt sympathy, Judge Brentford."

"It is a bitter, a cruel blow to both my daughter and myself, and we, Estelle and me, had gone out to my country place to remain until all was over, but unable to stand its memories, for my boy was born there, we started back again to-day to my town home; but let me not speak of myself, Mr. Monte, but ask if you are a kinsman of my old friend Captain Roland Monte of the navy?"

"His son, and I am glad to meet one who knew my father, whose sad fate you know doubtless?"

"I heard of it, sir, and his misfortunes, and I recall having seen something of your troubles

of late; but come, walk home with me, for you can soon return, and Estelle will be so glad to be able to thank you for the debt of gratitude she owes you."

Mark Monte hesitated.

Never before had he seen so beautiful a girl as was Estelle Brentford, and never had his heart been moved by any woman as she had made him feel.

She was beautiful, an heiress, a belle in society, and the daughter of a famous leader of the bar.

He was poor, had been tried for crimes upon the high seas, and was but the skipper of a small trading-vessel.

But he was warmly urged, and he could not resist the temptation to again meet the lovely girl.

So he went, and when he left the elegant mansion of Judge Brentford, Mark Monte was irrevocably in love with the maiden whose life he had risked his own to save.

It was late when he returned to his hotel, and he gave a sigh of relief when he learned that Mr. Ford Burton had not called upon him, and he retired for the night to dream of Estelle Brentford.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ESTELLE BRENTFORD.

THE look of the condemned man was stern and unbending, when Estelle entered the cell, and Pat, the keeper, closed the door behind her.

"Brother!"

It was all that Estelle could say, and she sprung toward him and threw her arms about his neck.

"You, then, have not utterly cast me off, my sister?" said Burt Brentford, softened toward her by her deep grief.

"No, oh, no! I have tried hard to get here to see you, Burt, to tell you that I do not believe you at heart all that they say you are, and that you acted under impulse beyond control when you killed the officer.

"No, brother, I have faith in you that all has not shaken."

"God bless you, Estelle!" and the man's voice trembled as he continued:

"But I am a bad man, for I did write father's name to that check to get money; but I was driven to desperation by my debts, and the fear of exposure.

"I hoped to have made the money good, but failed, and when Officer Hutchins came to arrest me, he was so insulting, telling me he was glad to see an aristocrat in trouble, and then he attempted to put irons on me, remarking that he would chain me like the dog that I was.

"This maddened me, and I sprung upon him, to fight for my freedom and escape.

"He drew a weapon, and I turned it upon him.

"You know the result.

"I fled, and I tried to live a correct life, having had such a lesson.

"I went to sea, rose to the command of a vessel, and it was put in the slave trade, and I was forced to wreck her to avoid capture, so lost all, and came home to see if my father would not give me the money that would be mine when I was of age.

"It was what Uncle Luke had left me, a few thousands only, but it would have enabled me to get another vessel.

"He not only refused, but had me arrested, and the result you know.

"Now, my sister, you know my story in all its vileness, and yet you seem not to shrink from me."

The man had spoken in a low earnest tone, and his sister had listened with the deepest attention to every word he had uttered.

Then she said:

"Brother Burt, I have tried hard to see you, but father forbade it.

"He is unhappy, wretched, and we have twice gone out to the country home and back again, for he is restless at all times.

"To-day father was called to Breezy Hill on account of damage done to the mansion by the storm, and so I was determined to see you and came as soon as he had driven away in the carriage.

"I could not let you die, Burt, and such a death, without feeling that one at least loved you and would bitterly mourn your fate."

"Ah, Estelle, such words cheer me; but let me tell you, my sweet child, that the hemp is not yet planted that will make the rope to hang me."

She started at his words and asked in a whisper:

"What do you mean, brother?"

"I can trust you?"

"With your life."

"I shall not be hanged."

"Thank God! is there a reprieve?"

"No."

"Not a pardon?"

"No."

"A commutation of sentence?"

"No."

"Tell me what your strange words mean, Burt."

"Well, sister mine, that you may not suffer, as I see you do on my account, I will tell you that I am not to hang, for friends are working to set me free, and I will surely go from here very soon."

"Do you mean you will escape?" she asked in a whisper.

"Yes."

She shook her head sadly.

"I fear not, Burt."

"Wait and see, and in the mean time hope."

"Should you be so fortunate, what then?"

"Do you mean as to my future?"

"Yes, brother Burt."

"I will go to sea as an officer on a vessel, and some day maybe you will be glad to own me as your brother."

"Heaven grant it!" she fervently said.

Then she added:

"Brother Burt, do you know I nearly lost my life yesterday?"

"Indeed? how was it?"

"You remember what a thunder storm we had?"

"Yes, the wind fairly shook this stout old structure."

"As I told you, father was restless, and concluded to come back to town, so we left Breezy Hill on horseback, letting the wagon follow with our luggage.

"We saw the storm coming up and rode rapidly to catch the ferry boat, which was taking the stage coach over the inlet.

"It had left the shore, but returned for us, the ferryman evidently urged to do so by a young man on the stage-box.

"The storm burst upon us in the middle of the inlet, and the thunder frightened my mare Jess so that she reared and fell backwards over the rail of the ferry-boat and dragged me with her.

"At the same instant the winds struck the ferry, and all was a scene of desperate danger and dire confusion.

"I felt myself grasped by a strong arm, and saw that it was the young man I had noticed upon the box.

"He broke the stirrup-strap that held my foot fast, and as Jess sunk, struck out for the shore.

"The ferry had blown some distance off and was pitching terribly, so he bailed and told them to go to the shore, and that he could swim there."

"He must have had wonderful confidence in himself and been a phenomenal swimmer," said Burt Brentford, deeply interested in the story.

"He was the bravest man I ever met, and he swam like a fish."

"And he saved you?"

"He did, and the ferry also reached the shore, while poor father had to be held to keep him from springing in after me, though he cannot swim a stroke.

"The gentleman reached the shore with me, but it was a fearful strain upon him, and we all drove hastily on to town, the stage putting father and myself down at home."

"And the stranger who saved your life?"

"He refused our hospitality, went on to the tavern, and gave his name with seeming reluctance; but father called in the evening, and after considerable urging he returned with him, and he proved to be the son of an old friend of father's, a Captain Roland Monte, of the navy."

"And his name is Monte?"

"Yes; Mark Monte, and he is a sailor who is to at once sail as captain of a vessel bound to the West Indies, but he promised to come and see us upon his return."

"And it will end in a pretty little romance, I'll bet; but if he is a worthy young man, all right, though no man that I know is good enough for you, Estelle."

Estelle Brentford blushed deeply, but soon after bade her brother good-by, and her heart was far lighter than when she had entered the jail, for she held hope that her brother was not to die after all, and his confidence in his escape had inspired her with trust that all would come out as he said.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WANDA'S VISIT.

AFTER the end of the trial, which ended in the acquittal of Mark Monte of the charges against him, the Salemists had a respite from excitement for awhile, for even the whaler's Nemesis seemed to have stopped his daring robberies of the incoming vessels.

That Malcolm Meredith, whose name all had begun to fear, had dared come into the port of Salem, with his vessel disguised, not a soul in the town would have believed, and that the escape of Mark Monte from the gallows was owing to his having found Captain Hudson, who disapproved all charges against the young sailor, no one suspected, other than the few most interested.

Having disappeared mysteriously, after his great service, not even Mark Monte knew where to find him, yet, in spite of all rumors against him, with Ethel he believed that after all the

dashing sailor might be innocent, for he remembered how black things had looked against him at one time.

Was her lover really guilty, or would he come some day and prove that he was cruelly sinned against, was the thought ever uppermost in the mind of Ethel Monte.

She saw her brother again go to sea with fear and dread.

She was not in want, for there was money left from the sum Mark had borrowed on the gem-studded miniature, and which Malcolm Meredith had redeemed and returned to her.

Then, too, she was not alone, for Captain Hudson was a friend and adviser, while her little home was fitted up with more comfort than ever before.

She had with her household duties, her cow and chickens, ample to occupy her mind, and she expected to be busy, and thus drive away evil forebodings.

The day after Mark's departure she was seated upon the front porch with old Captain Hudson, when a vessel entered the harbor.

She appeared to be a lumber schooner, and her bowsprit had been broken off, and a jury one rigged in its place, while her topmasts were gone, and her sails old and torn.

She looked to have seen rough weather and had to all appearances come in in distress.

She was loaded deep, and the lumber on her decks completely hid her hull.

Upon her decks half a dozen men were visible, and she sailed along in a very lubberly manner.

She dropped anchor after passing the cottage, and neither Ethel or Captain Hudson thought more of her, after remarking upon her having been in rough weather and being deeply laden.

But when morning came the strange craft was not visible, and wondering at her quick departure after coming into the harbor in distress, Captain Hudson spoke of it to Ethel, who at once thought:

"Could it have been his vessel?"

Just then they saw Wanda the Witch coming in her skiff, and heading as though to land at Cliff Cottage, and she at once went down to the shore to meet her.

She had not seen Wanda since Mark's trial, and she had formed a sincere regard for the strange woman whom all else seemed to hate and certainly greatly dreaded.

"Well, Wanda, I am glad you have come to see me," she said, as the witch brought her skiff ashore and sprung out.

"You are the only one who is ever glad to see me, Miss Ethel; but, I came because I have something to say to you."

"Ah! is there more trouble?" asked Ethel anxiously.

"No child, but has your brother gone?"

"Yes, he left yesterday."

"He's gone as skipper, has he not?"

"Yes, of a vessel out of Boston and bound to the West Indies."

"Luck to him then, for he deserves it."

"He certainly does deserve success after all of his misfortunes, and he is a brave, noble fellow, that brother of mine."

"He is all that you say; but when does he sail?"

"To-morrow, I guess, and perhaps to-day; but why do you ask?"

"Oh, only because a craft sailed out of this port last night that may meet him."

"Indeed! what craft was it, good Wanda?"

"Did you notice a vessel come in yesterday afternoon?"

"A schooner?"

"Yes."

"I saw a lumber craft come in, schooner rigged, and she seemed to be in distress and anchored off yonder; but she was gone, strange to say, this morning."

"Not much distress was she in."

"But her topmasts were broken off, and a spar seemed in place of her bowsprit, while her sails were torn."

"All put on."

"What do you mean?"

"She was not in distress."

"She surely looked it."

"She had no number on deck."

"The one I refer to had."

"It was make believe."

"She keeps a framework in her hold to put up at will, and play honest lumberman, and those broken topmasts and spar for a bowsprit were all rigged for a purpose, while the torn sails were bent on in place of good ones."

"That craft was the brig, or schooner, for she is both at will, of Captain Malcolm Meredith."

"Oh Wanda!"

"It is so."

"And he dared come into port?"

"Oh yes, he dare do anything."

"And he has gone?"

"Yes."

"But how do you know this?"

"He came to the cabin to see me."

"Ah! and why, good Wanda?"

"Well, he says that all believe him a pirate, and so he has to hide himself until he can prove to the contrary."

"He did good work to save your brother, but

wishes to keep away from you until he proves he is no freebooter.

"So he ran in, came to see me and learned from me that your brother had gone, so said he hoped to find him at sea.

"Then he asked me to come and tell you that he had been into port, and give you this note from him."

"Ah!" and Ethel grasped eagerly at the little folded paper which Wanda took from her bosom and handed to her.

"Now I will leave you."

"No, is there no answer?"

"None, for he said nothing of when he was to return."

"One moment, Wanda?"

"Yes!"

"Do you believe him to be the pirate they say he is?"

"I do, and I do not—I know not what to believe—yet."

"But I will know."

The woman turned without another word, sprung into her skiff and sailed away.

And going into the little arbor Ethel opened and read the note.

It was but a few lines:

"Trust me in the face of seeming proof of my guilt."

"Some day the clouds will roll away, and the truth be known."

"MALCOLM MEREDITH."

"I will trust him," was Ethel's firmly spoken words when she had read what her lover had written.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FOR LIFE AND FOR GOLD.

BURT BRENTFORD'S nerve did not fail him, as night approached and he expected the visit of the pretended priests.

He had been deeply moved by the visit of his wife and his sister during the day, but he had regained his perfect self-control, and when the door of his cell opened and admitted two persons in priestly garb, he was as calm as it was his wont to be.

"Two holy fathers to see yez, Mistur Brintford, and hapes o' good may they be afther doing yez," said Pat, by way of introduction.

"My son, I am glad to see you looking well, and I have brought good Father Ronald to see you and look to your spiritual comfort while I am called away," said the pretender who had planned the escape of the prisoner.

But, as Pat closed the door and departed, he said in a whisper, dropping the ecclesiastical whine he had assumed:

"This is your man."

"Ah!" and turning to the stranger, Burt Brentford continued:

"You understand my case?"

"I think so."

"I was found guilty of murder and am sentenced to be hanged."

"So I have heard."

"I do not care to hang, so my good friend here has planned a way to save me."

"It is a good plot."

"I am to go free, and you are to take my place?"

"Yes, for gold."

"Yes, I get my life, and you get your gold."

"Exactly."

"You comprehend that you will be punished?"

"I do."

"It may be a couple of years."

"The rest from dissipation will do me good mentally and physically."

"And your money?"

"I have deposited it to draw interest until I get out."

"Then there is no more to say?"

"Nothing."

"You will be on hand to-morrow night?"

"Promptly."

"Well, now I look at you, I believe I can readily pass for you."

"Oh, yes, though you are a very handsome man."

"Thank you, and I undersand your sly compliment in your words to yourself."

The pretended priest bowed, and the other said:

"You are as like as two peas, when you, Mr. Brentford, have been clean shaven."

"I will do this for you, and cut your hair when I come to-morrow night."

"Very well; and you, sir, I will meet where?"

"At the wharf where I told you."

"Then there is nothing more to be done but wait?"

"Nothing," and the two frauds took their departure, and Burt Brentford was left alone with his hopes and fears.

The next day he passed alone, and as darkness shut the bay out of sight, excepting the twinkling lights of the vessels at anchor, he turned from his window and waited.

An hour passed, and then steps were heard in the corridor.

The lock grated as the key was turned, the door opened, and the man who was to sell his liberty for gold was ushered in by Pat, who closed the door at once.

"You are on time, sir."

"Yes; it is to my interest to be."

"Have you your razor?"

"Yes, I am all ready for work," and the pretended priest at once began operations.

The long mustache of the prisoner was cut off, his waving brown curls were clipped short, and the garb of the visitor soon enveloped his form.

He did then look strangely like the other man, whom he was to impersonate.

"You know the corridors, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, I traveled them often, to and from my trial."

"Then there will be no trouble?"

"None; but throw yourself on my cot, for I shall call the keeper now."

"Luck attend you."

"I shall not fail; good-by, and accept my thanks."

"You are welcome to what I am to do for you—good-by."

They shook hands, and the prisoner in his disguise called out:

"Ho, keeper, I am ready to go now."

"Yis, father, I'm afther coming in a jiffy," replied Pat, and he soon opened the door.

"My son, you are a good fellow, and must not neglect an unfortunate friend here who is to die so soon."

"No, your Riverence, I'll be as good to him as though he were alrady did," and as though to prove his words, Pat called out:

"Good-night, Misther Brintford, and pleasant drames attind yez."

It was not exactly the consolation to extend a man under the shadow of the gallows, but Pat meant well.

"Good-night, Pat," came from the man on the cot, and the other followed the keeper out of the cell and along the corridor.

"I'm thinking, yer Riverence, he'll die game, will Misther Brintford," volunteered Pat, as they went along.

"It will be better, my son, if he will die repentant," was the response.

"Thruve for yez, your Riverence, but that's for yez to be afther seeing to."

Passing through the office the jailer was there, and asked how the priest left the prisoner.

"In calm mien and prayerful, my son," was the answer.

"I am glad, sir, for I feared he was going to the gallows with a spirit of bravado."

"But he certainly has shown wonderful nerve."

"Yes, my son," and the pretended priest used his handkerchief freely, having been suddenly attacked with a fit of coughing.

Thus he kept his face hidden from the piercing eyes of the jailer and passed on out into the yard.

Once out of the gate and he could hardly suppress the cry of joy that arose to his lips.

But he did so, and walking rapidly on soon neared the wharf where he was to meet the man whose plot had proven so successful.

He saw a form pacing to and fro, and as he approached, the man stepped quickly toward him with the remark:

"You are the prisoner?"

"Oh, no, I'm the free man, for the prisoner is in his cell," was the reply.

"I understand, and I congratulate you upon your escape."

"As I do you upon your plot."

"Now what is to be done?"

"I will take you at once to the vessel, only do not go on board with that priestly garb on."

"I will remove it at once."

"And put this cap and cloak on," and the plotter handed over the articles named.

"I am ready, sir," and the two stepped out of the shadow of a large warehouse and walked toward a ship.

There a boat awaited with two oarsmen and a coxswain, and getting into it, the order was given:

"Pull for the schooner."

Soon they arrived alongside of a large armed schooner that was riding at a single anchor, and with sails ready to set at an instant's notice.

The one who had planned all led the way into the cabin, and his companion's eyes moved quickly over the vessel and her rig.

The cabin was brightly lighted, and revealed a very comfortable sea home indeed, for it was handsomely furnished, and every luxury had been provided that a sailor could ask for, it seemed.

"Now, Captain Monte—"

"Why do you call me Monte?"

"That is your name, you know?"

"Ah, yes, I had forgotten."

"This schooner I now place under your command, and she is armed, provisioned and manned, all ready for sea in fact."

"She carries ten guns, eighty men, and is a very stanch and fleet craft."

"You have two under officers, whom I shall call in and present to you, and then I shall go ashore for one who is to be nominally her commander until you get to sea."

"Here are your instructions then, and you go as first officer until you get to sea, and then the nominal captain you will know, from what I have written you, just what to do with."

"Remember you are Captain Monte, and your schooner is the Black Bird, a buccaneer cruiser."

"Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"Then I shall return within the hour with your nominal commander."

"Now, if you will come on deck, I will have you meet your junior officers."

Burt Brentford arose without a word, and his mysterious commander called up two young officers and introduced them by name, not speaking the name, however, of the commander of the schooner, but saying:

"This gentleman is your superior officer whenever he deems fit to take command."

"Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply, and the plotter left the schooner, promising to return within the hour.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN COMMAND.

WHEN the day following his arrival at the Commonwealth Inn passed, and his promised employer did not come, Mark Monte began to grow a little anxious.

He could not understand the delay, and more, he was unable to leave the inn as he expected his sister at any moment.

After supper he went to his room and sat there in deep meditation.

The lovely face of Estelle Brentford arose before him, and he shuddered as he thought how sudden would have been her death but for him.

He had noticed her when she rode upon the ferry-boat, and he had indeed begged the ferryman to await her father and herself.

Their eyes had met, and his mental observation was that excepting his own beautiful sister never had he beheld face and form so lovely.

When the thunder frightened her horse, he had thrown aside his coat, hat, and shoes, and instantly sprung after her.

He remembered how she had trusted him, how she had begged him to save himself, and then his determination to save her or sink with her.

The kindness of the judge he recalled, and how a stern man, whom all seemed to stand in awe of, and considered themselves fortunate if recognized by him, he had been so gentle in his manner toward him, and had made him feel at once at home in his elegant mansion.

Thus in deep reverie sat the young sailor, when a visitor was announced by the servant.

A man with white hair and beard entered, a man who stooped a little, and was wrapped up as though fearing cold.

"My dear young friend, I am glad to see you!"

"I am Mr. Ford, your father's old friend," said the visitor, grasping the hand of the young sailor.

"I am happy to meet you, Mr. Ford, because you were my father's friend, as well as for your kindness to me."

"Be seated, sir, and as the night is chilly, let me order you a glass of wine."

"No, no, thank you, for we must be off at once, if you are ready."

"I am ready, sir."

"The fact is I was out of town, so just arrived, Captain Monte, but we will at once go on board the schooner, sir."

"I am sorry, sir, I have not time to talk over matters with you, but here are my written instructions, and when you have passed out by Boston Light, break the seal and read them."

"The schooner is all ready, sir, and in perfect trim, and let me now give you the hint that her voyage will be different from what you suppose, and the craft is thoroughly armed and manned for a special cruise."

"This is a surprise to me, sir, for I supposed she was to be a trader."

"Well, she goes under Government orders, sir; but your instructions will acquaint you with all that I now have not time to make known to you."

"I read of your misfortunes, sir, and know you as a gallant man and perfect sailor, so you are the one for my work."

"Now let us be off."

Wondering, Mark took up his kit and followed his strange patron.

They left the hotel quietly and walked slowly along toward the harbor, soon arriving at a place where there was a boat in waiting.

Entering the boat they were rowed in silence out to a schooner, which even in the darkness attracted the eye of the young sailor for her great beauty of model and symmetry of rig.

They were hailed as they approached and the old man answered:

"The captain."

"Ay, ay, come alongside," was the reply.

Boarding, the old man called to an officer and said:

"This gentleman is Captain Monte, and he takes the schooner to sea, as you know."

"He has instructions, as you have."

"Yes, Mr. Ford," replied the officer addressed, and he grasped the hand of Mark Monte.

Then the gentleman addressed as "Mr. Ford" said:

"Now, gentlemen, I must leave you, and captain, it is my wish that you go at once to sea, and be good enough to attract no more attention in going out than absolutely necessary, for as I told you your vessel was bound upon a special secret service."

"Farewell, sir," and the old man grasped Mark Monte's hand and turned away.

Clark escorted him to the gangway, and saw him into his boat, after which he at once turned to an officer and gave the command to get up the anchor and set sail.

The order was promptly obeyed and the graceful schooner went gliding seaward under easy canvas.

Out upon the waters was the boat with the old man, who now was alone, for the oarsmen had belonged to the schooner's crew.

He watched the schooner disappear in the gloom and then rowed shoreward, made his boat fast and walked at a pace that belied his white hair toward the Commonwealth Inn.

Ere he reached there he halted in the shadows of a building, straightened himself up, took from his head the hat and a wig, and from his face the false white beard, and walked into the office of the inn.

"My keys, please," he said to the night clerk. "Yes, Mr. Laws," and the clerk handed it to him and he went to his room.

Once within he made himself comfortable, and taking up pen and paper wrote a letter, which afterward he read half aloud to himself.

The letter was as follows:

"CAPTAIN EZRA VAIL:—

"DEAR SIR:—I send this letter by special messenger, as I think it best to remain here a day or two and gain what points I can after the discovery is made that your vessel has been cut out from her anchorage by pirates."

"I am glad to acquaint you with the fact that the young sailor arrived on time, and stopped at this inn."

"I already had all arranged to come for him at the last minute, and I beg to state that my plot with the *real* captain was successful in every respect."

"The party left to represent him secured his money and deposited it for his future use, so awaits the result, and I stated in a previous letter what that result would be."

"The instructions for the one who deems himself commander will surprise him, when he opens them at sea, and the one who takes charge then understands all thoroughly and is master of the situation."

"The vessel has sailed, and I watched her out of sight, so there is nothing now in the way of success."

"In a few days I shall return and report in person."

"Until then, believe me,

"Your very humble servant,

"JUSTIN LAWS."

CHAPTER XXX.

A METAMORPHOSIS.

At eight o'clock upon the morning following the night that covered the deeds related in the foregoing chapter, there was some commotion discovered by outsiders going on within the jail.

Messengers left, and went to and fro, and soon Government officials of the town were seen to enter the dismal walls.

At last it leaked out that the prisoner, Burt Brentford, under sentence of death, had made his escape.

This rumor spread about the town, and was not very long in reaching the ears of Estelle Brentford, for the coachman, who had gone for the mail, heard the story, and hastened home with it.

Estelle's face turned pale when she heard it, and then flushed with joy.

"He said he would not die on the gallows," she murmured, and after sending the coachman again down to the town to glean what news he could, she went to her room to rejoice over what she had heard, and pray that there was no mistake about it.

The news also reached a person pacing to and fro in a pleasant room of a cozy inn.

Upon the floor sat a boy of seven years of age, a handsome, manly little fellow, floating a pretty model of a brig in a basin of water.

The woman was the one who had visited Burt Brentford the day before in his cell, and who the reader knows was his wife.

The boy was their little son.

The poor wife, with white face and burning eyes, was pacing the room, and her thoughts were upon her husband in his cell.

Suddenly she heard two persons talking in the corridor, and she started as the words came to her ears:

"Yes, he escaped last night, so has cheated the gallows."

"But how in Heaven's name could he escape from that place, Morton?"

"No one knows; but it is certain that he is gone, for his lawyer's clerk boards here, you know, and he said at dinner just now that Brentford had escaped."

The two men passed on, and Beatrice Brentford heard no more.

With a cry that startled her boy she sunk upon her knees by the bed and began to pray aloud.

"Mamma, it isn't bedtime.

"What makes you say your prayers now?" asked the little boy, coming to her side.

"Because mamma has much to be thankful for, my son."

"Kneel down and say your little prayers, too."

The boy obeyed, and then the woman arose from her knees, a happy smile upon her face, and said:

"Come, my son, we will take a walk in the streets."

"Mamma wants to hear what is going on."

And so they went out for their walk, and what Beatrice Brentford heard made her heart glad.

In the mean time the coachman had returned to the Brentford mansion and told Estelle that:

"Master Burt had certainly made his escape."

"Father will return to-night, or I would send you after him, James," said Estelle, and she went to receive her brother's attorney, who had called to make known the news.

In the mean time the jail officials were all in a ferment.

Pat, the keeper of Brentford's cell, was as white as a corpse, and the jailer was nearly as pale and equally nervous, while the town officers were examining into the means of the prisoner's escape.

Pat's story was told with a look that showed he was honest in all he said.

He stated that the two fathers had come the evening before, and as one who had been a friend of the prisoner, and his regular attendant was called away for a few days, another priest was to come and pray with the unfortunate man.

The other priest had come, and after remaining half an hour in the cell had asked to be let out.

He, Pat, had escorted "his Reverence" to the gate, and the jailer had held a short conversation with him as he passed through the office.

As he made his last round of the cells at midnight, he had noticed the prisoner snoring, something he had not known him to do before, so he had called to him and been promptly answered that he was all right, but had a cold, he thought.

In the morning at eight the jailer's wife went with the prisoner's breakfast, and a man, not Mr. Brentford, had said:

"Good-morning, madam—permit me to introduce myself as all that remains of the departed Burt Brentford."

The woman had uttered a shriek and dropped the salver with the breakfast, and Pat had discovered that there had been a remarkable metamorphosis.

"The lady's nerves are not strong, and strange too for a habitant of this dismal abode—pray replace the breakfast she has destroyed as soon as possible, for I have quite an appetite."

So had said the prisoner, and Pat had yelled aloud until help came.

That's all he knew.

The jailer told his story, as did also the jailer's wife and every one connected with the jail was examined separately.

Then the prisoner's substitute was sent for, and all remarked his striking resemblance to Burt Brentford, when one was not particular to make a close inspection.

Their height was the same, and the contour of their faces, and dressed in the garb of a priest it was very natural that the jailer and his assistants should be very readily deceived, so that the idea that they had been bribed was at once dismissed.

It was a clever escape by a clear case of deception.

The prisoner appeared in double irons, for Pat had seen to that.

And yet he came in with a smiling countenance and said pleasantly:

"Good-morning, gentlemen."

"I trust your Honors find yourselves well this fine morning?"

"Their Honors" were astounded.

They looked very angry and intensely stern.

"Who are you, sir?" roared the senior of the party.

"A prisoner," was the unruffled reply.

"Your name, sir?"

There was a twinkle in the prisoner's eyes as he answered:

"Sam Slick, your Honor."

"Yes, and you are *slick* by nature, sir, as well as by name."

"You flatter me, your Honor."

"Silence, sir! and tell me what all this means?"

"Your Honor, how can I be silent and tell you what you would wish?"

"Look here, sir, you stand in a very dangerous position."

"You occupy the cell of a man condemned to be hanged, and you look enough like him to hang you and say nothing about his escape, so keep a civil tongue in your head."

The prisoner laughed and the questioner again asked:

"Now tell me what this means?"

"Ah! your Honor now puts it in a way I can understand."

"It means, sir, that I did not wish to see my dear friend Brentford hung, so I just played

priest, for I knew that all you could do to me was to bring the charge of aiding and abetting the prisoner's escape and my punishment cannot be more than two years' imprisonment."

"I am not so sure of that, sir."

"I am though."

"And this man Brentford accepted his pardon at your expense?"

"Oh no, I took his place at his expense—you see he has done well by me and I can only return the compliment—and it would be death to him and is but a short imprisonment to me."

"You shall get all that the law can inflict, sir, for your crime."

Mr. Sam Slick smiled blandly, and was then sent to his cell, but which was a different one from the one which had been occupied by Burt Brentford.

CHAPTER XXXI.

UNDER A CLOUD.

It was late when Judge Brentford returned to his home, but Estelle was up awaiting him, and he heard with stern, white face the news she had to tell him.

Estelle thought that from his lips came the murmur:

"Thank God!"

But she was not sure, and kissing her father good-night went to her room.

The judge paced the library until nearly dawn, but the father and daughter met at a late breakfast.

The morning paper had arrived, and both were anxious to know all that had occurred, so adjourned to the library as the judge said:

"My child read to me what the paper says."

Unfolding the morning journal, Estelle read as follows:

"THE HANGMAN FOILED!"

"WOLVES' IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING!"

"A CLEVER ESCAPE FROM DEATH!"

"THE FUGITIVE GONE TO SEA!"

"WILL IT BE THE BLACK FLAG?"

"One of the cleverest and boldest rescues we ever heard of was made last night from the town jail, when Mr. Burt Brentford, who was under sentence of death, escaped from his cell and became a free man."

"The trial and condemnation of Burt Brentford are too fresh in the minds of our readers to be recalled now, and the deepest sympathy was felt by our citizens for the father and sister of the unfortunate young man, and many will now doubtless be rejoiced for their sake at least that he has escaped his doom of a death on the gallows."

"From all we can learn of the escape of Brentford, it seems that he refused the kind offices of our clergymen, but permitted one who was supposed to be a missionary priest to visit him."

"Not the slightest suspicion was aroused by the occasional visits to the prisoner of the man who proved to be a wolf in sheep's clothing, for he certainly was no priest."

"He stated several days ago that he was called out of town, so introduced one he said was a brother priest, and this is the man now in the jail in the place of Brentford."

"He visited the prisoner and carried out his plot with perfect success."

"He shaved the prisoner, cut his hair and changed clothing with him, and, as the two were strangely alike, without a thought that all was not right, Patrick O'Grady, the keeper of the corridor in which was the cell of the condemned man, permitted him to pass out, and even the jailer, who spoke a few words to the supposed priest, did not suspect him of being the man he had under guard."

"The next morning the cheat was discovered, and the man remaining in the cell gave his name as Sam Slick, took the situation with perfect indifference, and said that he had simply done his duty by a friend and would accept the alternative."

"But another strange circumstance is connected with the escape of Brentford, and that is the mysterious disappearance of the beautiful schooner *Blackbird*, just fitted out and armed by a wealthy merchant as a cruiser to run down the noted buccaneer Malcolm Meredith in his fleet craft the *Red Dove*."

"There was not a keeper on the schooner, as she was waiting for her crew and commander, who was to have been Captain Mark Monte, a young sailor who has lately been under trial at his home in Salem upon the charge of mutiny, but of which he was found not guilty."

"This young captain had arrived in town and was at the Commonwealth Inn, but he, too, disappeared last night, paying his score at the tavern and stating that he was going at once to sea."

"It is believed that Brentford sailed on this vessel, and if so, the schooner went without orders from her owner and with a crew who cut her out under cover of the night."

"And more, if she sailed with Monte as her captain, he has done an act that will place him and his vessel under the ban of outlawry."

"Who the first pretended priest was no one knows, nor can any trace be found of him, and the prisoner remains silent upon all questions put to him, other than that he acted to serve his friend Brentford, to whom he owed all that he did."

"As the man cannot be forced to speak, he will be given the full penalty of his crime in aiding Brentford's escape and for contempt of court in refusing to answer the questions put to him."

"The whole affair is most mysterious, and we would not be surprised if the Blackbird, once an African slaver, would become again a hunted vessel, and whether under the black flag of the pirate, time will show."

Such was the article which Estelle Brentford read to her father.

Several times she paused in her reading, either from emotion, or to see if her father had aught to say; but the judge made no comments until she had ceased reading, and then said:

"My child, who do you think has thus befriended your wicked brother?"

"Father, I have no idea; but certain it is that Burt has had friends who have proven as true as steel."

"Yes, and I regret he is not more worthy of such friendship; but this man who is in his stead?"

"Who can he be, sir?"

"No one seems to know, from what the newspaper says."

"Well, Burt has escaped the gallows, and I can but feel glad that at last that ignominy is spared us."

"But can it be that he has but gone to lead a life of sin?"

"I do not believe it, father?"

"Then why should he go on this vessel?"

"It is but a suspicion that he has done so, father."

"True, and that noble fellow Monte, he certainly cannot be what the paper hinted?"

"He told you, sir, when he was here, how he was accused, tried and proven guiltless."

"True; but why did he go on the schooner without her legitimate crew and with no authority to sail?"

"That, too, is surmise—in fact, father, perhaps Captain Monte has been led into some trap."

"Ah! I had not thought of that, Estelle."

"It is a mystery all around, and I shall at once see if your brave rescuer has met with trouble, and he shall not want for a friend, if he has."

"I will go at once down-town."

And the judge did so; but several hours spent in search and inquiries discovered no more than what the paper had stated to be the facts of the case.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE VAILED VISITOR.

THERE was a great deal of excitement in the town over the escape of the condemned prisoner, and the mysterious flight of the schooner Blackbird.

A cruiser had at once been dispatched in pursuit of the fugitive craft, and secret service men had gone in every direction to try and find the prisoner, or some clew to whither he had gone.

Of Mark Monte nothing more was known than that he had received an aged visitor in his room, and had soon after gone out with him, telling the clerk he was going to sea.

In proof of this, he carried his kit with him.

No one knew who his white-haired visitor could be, and so all trace of the young sailor was lost.

The schooner had been cut out, that was certain, for people who had been out on the wharves late at night, reported having seen several boats going to and from the land and the Blackbird.

Two coasters coming up the harbor had met the schooner going out, and reported that they believed her a cruiser, for her guns were run out and her decks were full of men.

She showed no lights, strange to say, and under the sail she had set, seemed to fairly fly along over the waters.

In the mean time the man who had given his name as Sam Slick sat in his cell in the jail, taking matters with an indifference that showed a nature equal to all emergencies.

He ate heartily, read when he felt in the humor, for he had fallen heir, at his own request, to the things left in the cell and belonging to Burt Brentford.

He chatted pleasantly with his keeper, who, however, being Pat, was in no pleasant mood toward him.

Pat was angry on account of his daring to play the part of a priest, as well as his having so cleverly fooled him and aided the escape of the prisoner.

"A lady to see yez, my foine bird, an' ef I was afther havin' my way, I'd let no one say yez but the hangman and sexton," said Pat one morning; but for all his threat he would have been the last man to wish to have seen it carried out.

"A lady to see me, Sir Patrick! this is a glad surprise, and it shows that I am becoming popular—but hold! be she young, or be she old, Patrick?"

"How the devil am I afther knowing, whin her face is all wrapped up?"

"Ah! a sufferer from toothache, maybe; but one minute, Sir Patrick, Knight of the Cells, and let me tell you that there is a legend in my family that one lady is to be avoided by me."

"Now I cannot escape from her, so be she the fair demon I fear me it is, one who once was Mrs. Samuel Slick, you must stand without to succor me, for, though I fear no mortal man, I stand in holy awe of a petticoat."

"Did she say that her name was Susan?"

"That is not my name, sir, so I am not the one you seem to dread to meet, and into the cell stepped a veiled sister, clad in black."

"Ah! lady, I am glad to meet you, if I am really the fortunate man whom you have come to see."

"Be seated, please," and the man was really courtly in his manners.

"You are Mr. Slick, I believe, the prisoner who aided the escape of Mr. Brentford?"

"I am, lady."

The sister glanced at Pat and said:

"I was to see the prisoner, alone, my man."

Pat fully understood her as she slipped into his hand a gold piece, and he went off to see if it was counterfeit for he had become strangely distrustful since he had discovered a villain in a priest's garb, as he deemed the prisoner.

"Be seated, lady."

"Thank you, no, for I remain but a short while, and I am going to ask you not to speak to any one of my coming, or rather not betray who I am."

"It would be hard to do, lady, as I do not know myself; but I certainly would keep your secret were you to trust me with it."

She raised her veil and the prisoner fairly started at the beautiful face revealed.

"I am Miss Brentford, the sister of the man you proved such a friend to."

The prisoner bowed low and said:

"And may I ask why Miss Brentford has called upon me?"

"I desire to know all that you can tell me regarding my unfortunate brother?"

"Say fortunate rather, Miss Brentford, as your brother escaped the gallows."

"True, and he was fortunate; but I mean he is unfortunate in the sorrows that have come upon him."

"I dearly love my erring brother, sir, and cannot believe that he was guilty of deliberately taking life."

"He was cast off by my father, but I was so happy to learn of his escape, and I have come here to thank you for your noble part, and to see if I cannot in some way serve you."

"I also wish to know all that you can tell me of my brother, your friend, for he must be dear to you, as you have sacrificed your liberty for him."

The man's face flushed, and then became pale at the words.

His indifferent manner was gone on the instant, and she had pierced beyond the outward, insolent exterior, though to her he was all respect.

"Miss Brentford," he said, and he seemed deeply moved.

"I am an unfortunate poor devil, and I am going to tell you a secret also."

"Had the surroundings of my early life been different; had I had such a sister as you are, I would have been a man of a caliber far from what I am to-day."

"I had a step-mother in early life, and she was a fiend, and after the death of my poor hen-pecked father, my step-mother married again, and the man was a widower with a son and a daughter."

"My father left me well off, and to get the money I was, before I was of age, forced into a marriage with this man's daughter, my senior in years."

"Then my life became such that I fled

from the hell I endured, leaving all to believe me dead, and my wife got my fortune."

"I tell you this to show you why I went to the bad, for I did go, and every noble aspiration of my early youth was blasted."

"I am to-day a creature of circumstances, and I tell you frankly that I never knew your brother until I came to this cell, disguised as a priest."

"I came here with one who sought to aid him, but whether that one acted from friendship or selfishness, I do not know."

"I believe, however, from what I saw of him, that he had other motives in wishing to save your brother from the gallows than to simply keep him from an ignominious death."

"And this man, sir?" asked Estelle, who had listened with deepest attention to the story of the strange man.

"I do not even know his name."

"He was disguised in all his dealings with me, and I confess it to you, Miss Brentford, though with shame, that I acted only from a pecuniary point of view."

"I received a handsome sum, five thousand dollars, for I don't mind telling you, to take your brother's place here."

"It is in bank, awaiting the end of my imprisonment, and with it I shall start life anew."

"Now you know all that I can tell you, Miss Brentford."

Estelle seemed disappointed, to feel that the prisoner had acted for gold instead of friendship; but she said:

"I am sorry I can do nothing to release you, sir, whatever your motive."

"No, I take the consequences, and my time of imprisonment I believe will not be over a year, and in that time I can recuperate my shattered health and have time to think, a thing I have not done of late years."

"I am satisfied, Miss Brentford, as it is."

"And you can give me no hint as to what has become of my brother?"

"I can only say that from a few words I overheard between his real rescuer and himself, I believe he has gone to sea in command of a vessel, but where bound, or on what cruise I do not know."

"I thank you, sir, and will bid you good-morning, with the hope that your imprisonment will be of short duration," and Estelle Brentford left the cell and the prison.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE NEWS AT HOME.

CAPTAIN HUDSON was an early riser, and he kept up his habit after he became an inmate of Cliff Cottage.

Often Ethel was won't to find him walking about the garden when she arose, and he took the greatest delight in keeping all on the place "ship-shape" as he expressed it.

He was also wont to walk into the town each morning for the paper, and enjoyed an hour after breakfast looking over it, while Ethel was busy with her housekeeping.

Since her brother had left she had received one letter from him, written from the Commonwealth Inn in Boston, and it gave a modest report of his rescue of Estelle Brentford, though he gave no name.

The stage-driver however made the story public in Salem, and was loud in the praise of Mark Monte for his gallant rescue, while he said that the lady he rescued was very beautiful and an heiress.

This Mark's letter to Ethel had said nothing about, but she surmised from what he had written that he was more than happy at having been able to save the life of the young girl.

One morning Captain Hudson arose as usual by sunrise, worked awhile in the garden, fed the chickens and then walked to town after the mail.

Breakfast was ready when he returned, and he had the morning paper, which Ethel took up and glanced over.

Instantly she uttered a cry of alarm that startled the old sailor, for she had suddenly come upon her brother's name.

It was the article giving an account of Burt Brentford's escape, and which it will be remembered referred to Mark Monte's having gone off with the schooner without orders.

She read it through to Captain Hudson and then said:

"Oh, Uncle Hudson, what does this mean?"

The old sailor was at a loss to know, and said so.

"Have our sorrows and precautions not ended yet?"

"I hope it will come out all right, my child."

"But this is a false accusation against Mark, for he was not going to command an armed vessel, and besides, if it was the case, he would not sail in her without orders."

"So I feel, Ethel."

"But the owner says his vessel was cut out, and that Mark went in command, and it is hinted that this escaped prisoner went on board of her and she may fly the pirate flag."

"This is fearful, Uncle Hudson, but I am sure it is another plot against my poor brother!"

"I cannot understand it, Ethel; but let us go at once to Boston and see what we can find out."

"I will go, uncle, while you remain here, and please see if there is anything going on here that will give you a clew, for I cannot but suspect if there is treachery against Mark it originated in Salem."

"I can believe that, my child."

"I will take to-day's stage, at noon, and find this gentleman who was Mark's correspondent, and thus learn all."

"I will be ready at once, while you go down and engage me a seat in the stage and see if you can learn anything about the town."

The old sailor at once returned to the town and went to the stage office, and engaged a seat for Ethel to Boston in the coach that left at noon.

Then he dropped into the tavern and found all excited there over the morning's news, and the general impression was that Mark Monte had run off with the schooner and turned buccaneer, for the people were determined to find him guilty of wrong doing, owing to the secret influences at work against him in the town, and which could have been traced to Ezra Vail and his son, if a thorough search had been made for his relentless foes.

When he returned to the cottage Captain Hudson told Ethel that public opinion was against Mark, and added:

"Now I thought, if he has secret foes here, it was best for you not to be seen going to Boston, so I engaged your seat for a lady, giving no name, and telling the driver he would pick you up on the hill, so you can wait there, and I will go with you to the spot."

"You did just right, Uncle Hudson, for it is better for me to go secretly to Boston, as I might be followed if seen to leave the town."

"There is underhand work somewhere, and I will find it out," she said, firmly, and there was a dangerous look in her eyes, such as a stag might have when brought to bay by a pack of hounds.

Ethel ate an early lunch, and then, with the old sailor carrying her little sachel, made her way to the hill-top over which the stage passed on its way to Boston.

She had not long to wait before it came in sight, and she was glad to see that there were few passengers.

It was nightfall when she was put down at the Commonwealth Inn, and she was given a pleasant room by the clerk, who was struck with her great beauty.

"What name shall I register, miss?" he asked, politely.

"Miss—Hudson," she said, with an effort, suddenly deciding not to give the name of Monte under the circumstances of her wishing to remain unknown.

Nothing could be done that night, other than to read all that the papers had said about the matter.

As Ethel came out of the supper-room, she caught sight of a familiar form.

It was Justin Laws, and she stepped quickly into the parlor so that he should not see her.

She knew that he was Ezra Vail's confidential man, and that he had been absent from Salem for some little time, and it was something Mr. Justin Laws was not wont to do, go away from home, as his wife wished him constantly under her eye.

Going to her room, Ethel rung for the chambermaid, and giving her a piece of

gold, asked her to find out just how long Mr. Justin Laws had been at the inn.

Encouraged by the money the girl went off, and soon returned with her report.

Then she added:

"I takes care of his room, miss, and I'll tell you, as you've been kind to me, and you wish to know about the gentleman, that I believes he is a play actor, or a detective, for I have seen several disguises in his room."

"He hides 'em, but I leaves no dust hangin' round, so looks everywhere for it, so just found them disguises, as I said."

"And more, miss: one night when I was on the watch, I seen an old gent come out o' his room, with gray hair and beard, and go into the room of that young captain they say has run off with a schooner, and which I don't believe a word of, for he was that much of a gentleman he could do no wrong."

"He came out with the young captain, and they went out together, and it was that night he ran off, as the nabers says."

"Then the old gent comes back late, and goes into his room, and as I had gone in while he was out, and nobody was there, he must have been the old man in disguise, seeing as the gray wig and beard was there in the under drawer the next day, and which I opens to clean out, you know, miss."

"Yes, I know," replied Ethel, and she thought that she had found a valuable ally in the very neat and curious Rachel, so continued:

"Well, Rachel, I thank you for what you have told me, and I will pay you well to serve me, and for any information you can bring me about the gentleman, Mr. Laws, in room twenty-one."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ETHEL'S SEARCH.

THE next morning Ethel Monte arose bright and early.

She seemed to be pleased with what information she had extracted from Rachel the chambermaid, for she murmured to herself while dressing:

"I believe Justin Laws is under the pay of Ezra Vail to work harm against my brother, and I will sift his villainy to the ends."

"If not, why is he here and assuming disguises, and why should Mark go out with him?"

"If I need advice in my attempt to hunt out this plot against Mark, for plot it is, I know to whom I can go, for he certainly will aid me after what has occurred."

After breakfast Ethel rung for Rachel, and that worthy informed her that the gentleman in number twenty-one had gone out quite early.

Then Ethel, deeply veiled, sallied forth to find Mr. Ford Burton, her brother's correspondent and employer.

A thorough search revealed the fact that no such merchant could be found in Boston.

This looked like a fraud and a plot upon her brother, and she wondered what was to be done next.

Her brother had been offered the captaincy of a schooner in the West Indian trade, and he had accepted it.

He had been told to come to the Commonwealth Inn and there his employer would join him, and his vessel would be ready to sail.

An old gentleman had called for Mark Monte, and the latter had paid his score at the hotel and left.

This old man had given the name of Ford Burton to the clerk.

But Rachel the chambermaid had said that upon the very evening of her brother's disappearance a man with gray hair and beard had left room twenty-one, entered Mark Monte's room and the two had gone out together.

In room twenty-one dwelt Justin Laws, and the chambermaid reported that he had disguises there of various kinds, among them a gray beard and wig.

As Ford Burton could not be found, it was natural for Ethel to consider him a myth, and she was convinced that her brother had fallen into another plot set by Ezra and Rupert Vail through their hireling Justin Laws.

"I will go and place the matter as it stands before Judge Brentford, and ask his advice,"

she said, when, tired out and anxious, she returned to the inn to dinner.

After a rest and a late dinner, she asked the way to the Brentford mansion, and reached the gate just as a lady's hand was upon the latch.

"Is this the home of Judge Brentford?" she asked.

"Yes; will you walk in, for I am Miss Brentford," and Estelle gazed with admiration into the lovely face, now pale and anxious.

"Thank you, yes, if I can see your father?" and Ethel was also struck with Estelle's beauty.

"I regret to say my father was called to New York on important business, and departed for that city an hour ago on the packet, for I just returned from seeing him off."

She saw the look of regret that swept over Ethel's face, and noted the lips quiver, so continued:

"Will you not come in and rest, for you look tired out."

"I am worried, Miss Brentford, and as your father is not here, I will frankly tell you who I am, and why I come to see him."

"I am the sister of Mark Monte, Miss Brentford, and—"

Ethel paused, for Estelle's face flushed with pleasure, and she said eagerly:

"Oh, how glad I am to meet you, Miss Monte, for I owe my life to your brave, noble brother."

"Come into the house at once, and I insist upon it that you become my guest."

Thus urged, Ethel entered the elegant mansion, and there was that about Estelle Brentford which caused her to feel that in her she had a friend, so she told her just why she had come.

"I came to your father, Miss Brentford, for I knew no one else, and as he is a judge, and must know so much of the world, I felt that he would be able to advise me."

"I did not wish for him to feel that because Mark had served you I had a claim upon him; but I was sure he would advise me for the best."

"And he will do so upon his return, though I regret to say he may be absent more than a week."

"Still, we must see what can be done, and I hope you will command me in anything in which I can be of the slightest aid," responded Estelle, drawn toward the friendless girl as toward one whom she could dearly love, and anxious to serve Mark Monte's sister.

Then Ethel told her all, from their misfortunes beginning with the death of Captain Roland Monte, to the trial of Mark for mutiny, and the offer made him by letter from Mr. Ford Burton, whom she had been unable to find.

She also told Estelle what Rachel had said of Justin Laws, and after knowing all the facts Miss Brentford said:

"It seems to me that there is a plot in all this, as you say, where this man Laws is the confidential clerk of Rupert Vail, who you say has tried to force you into a marriage with him."

"I am sure there is a plot, and I also believe that Captain Malcolm Meredith can clear himself of the charges against him, if he is given an opportunity to do so."

"I hope so sincerely, for your sake, Miss Monte, but the piracies placed at the door of this Captain Meredith of the Red Dove, I fear will be hard to disprove."

"Still, your's brother's case looked hopeless, with the circumstantial evidence against him, and yet he was innocent, so we will not consider Captain Meredith also free of guilt until he is proven to be all that he is said to be."

"Now you will stay with me here as my guest, for in fact I will not take no for an answer."

"But I have faith in the girl Rachel obtaining information for me, or I frankly say I would be happy to be near you and have your aid and sympathy."

"You mean that you must be at the inn to see Rachel?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have a plan, and that is for you to keep your room there, so you can go to it each day and have a talk with her, though,

as you might again meet this man Laws, I think it would be best for her to visit you once each day here, or send you word.

"So now I will return with you to the inn and you can arrange with her and accompany me home, and Mr. Laws will not see you, for should he do so he will, if guilty, at once grow suspicious."

"You are so good to me, Miss Brentford."

"Oh, no, for it is my pleasure to befriend you all in my power."

"But there is one thing that we must find out?"

"Yes?"

"And that is who it is that really owns this schooner that was to have been sent out after Meredith, the pirate."

"True, that will be an important item in our favor, but I am sure, had Mark known that he was to have been ordered out to hunt down Malcolm Meredith, he would not have taken command of the schooner, for you know Captain Meredith saved me from death."

"Yes, and his going on the vessel shows to me that he was deceived, especially as she sailed, it seems, without orders."

"But we will understand the situation better when we find out who owns the runaway schooner."

Thus the two young girls entered upon their plot to discover the mystery that hung over the escape of Burt Brentford and his being said to have sailed upon the schooner which Mark Monte had run off with from her anchorage, though intended as her commander by her unknown owners.

CHAPTER XXXV.

TWO FAIR PLOTTERS.

RACHEL was readily pressed into service by Ethel, especially when she had thrust into her hand a bank-note by Estelle Brentford, who did it so slyly that her friend did not see it.

"I wish you, Rachel, to keep your eyes upon the movements of the gentleman in number twenty-one and know who visits him, when he goes out and how long he remains."

"Then, as you say he writes his letters in his room, try and see if you can to whom they are addressed, and all you can find out come and report to me each evening."

"Yes, miss; but the gent is out now, so I can get you the disguises I spoke of, if you wish."

"This looks like prying into another's affairs, but I suppose it would be best to see them," and Ethel turned to Estelle who answered:

"Yes, by all means, and then go and ask the clerk for a perfect description of the man who called for your brother."

So Rachel soon returned with various disguises, and one was a pair of gold spectacles, a white beard and wig, and the cloak and hat of an elderly gentleman of fashion in that day.

Then Rachel went to the parlor and asked to see the clerk who had sent Mr. Ford Burton up to her brother's room the night he left the inn.

"I am anxious, sir, to make inquiries regarding Mr. Ford Burton, if you please, and know what you can tell me of him."

"I only saw the gentleman twice, miss, and that was when he called to leave a note for Captain Mark Monte, whom he was expecting, he said, to take command of a vessel he owned, and again when he called in the captain and the two left the inn together."

"Will you describe Mr. Ford, please?"

The clerk was most anxious to oblige Miss Hudson and her lovely friend Miss Brentford, who was known to him by sight, so said:

"He was an oldish gentleman, with gray hair and beard, both worn long."

"And his dress?"

"Ah, yes; he had a pair of gold spectacles on, and wore a cloak, while he carried a gold-headed cane."

Ethel glanced at Estelle, and thanking the clerk, the two departed together.

"Well, that is the description of what Justin Laws would be in the cloak, false beard and wig, and wearing the gold spectacles in his room," said Ethel.

"Yes; and there is a gold-headed cane in his room, too, Rachel said, you remember, while you say he never carries it at home?"

"I never saw him with a cane in my life; but now to find out who this strange schooner really belonged to," and they made their way to the office of the commandant of the post.

That officer Estelle Brentford knew well, for he often dined with her father, so she determined to send in her name.

The result was that the two young ladies were at once admitted, and a courtly gentleman in uniform came forward and met them, while he said:

"This is an honor, Miss Estelle, which I had not anticipated."

Estelle introduced Ethel, and replied:

"And my coming, commodore, must be a secret, pray remember; but my friend Miss Monte is the sister of Captain Mark Monte, who is said to have run off with the schooner Blackbird."

"Indeed! I am glad to meet you, Miss Monte, for your father and myself were middies together, and it was hard for me to believe that his son had been guilty of what he is charged with."

"He is not guilty, sir, and I thank you for your trust in him."

"Misfortune has dogged us unstintingly of late, and my brother Mark came to take command of a vessel which he had the offer of from a correspondent, who said he was the friend of our father."

"He said that he knew of our sorrows and needs, and so offered him the command, and Mark did not know more than that the vessel was a schooner, armed by permission of Government, as she was to cruise in the West Indies, and that is all."

"He was met at the inn by his employer and left with him, and more I do not know, except that the papers imply he cut the schooner Blackbird out and ran her to sea as a pirate."

"And who was this shipping merchant, Miss Monte, for by finding him you can ascertain all regarding your brother?"

"He signed himself as Ford Burton, sir, but I can learn of no one who has ever heard of him."

The commodore called a clerk, wrote a line on a slip of paper and sent him off with it.

Soon he returned with the report:

"There is no such person in the city, sir."

"This is strange indeed: are you sure that is the name, Miss Monte?"

"I am, sir; but can you tell me who owned the schooner that had been given a Government permit to go armed?"

"But one craft has been given such permit from this port, Miss Monte, and that is the schooner Blackbird."

"And to whom does she belong, sir?"

"Her owners wished the matter of ownership kept a secret."

"Ah! and you cannot tell me?"

"It has been said that your sex cannot keep a secret, Miss Monte," answered the commodore with a smile, "but as this one has already leaked out I do not see the harm in letting you know."

"Permit me to guess, sir, and if I name the owners, you need make no reply, so that will clear you of having told me."

"Thank you, and who would you guess?"

"Vail & Company, whalers, of Salem."

The commodore smiled but made no reply, and then Ethel asked:

"Will the Blackbird be pursued, sir?"

"Two vessels of-war are already in chase of her."

"Pardon me, but it is supposed that she has turned pirate?"

"Yes, that is the belief of all, I learn."

"And Mr. Burt Brentford is supposed to have gone on her?"

"Yes, that is the surmise, though upon very slight grounds, other than that the Blackbird was cut out from her anchorage the night of Mr. Brentford's escape, and permit me, Miss Estelle, to congratulate you upon your brother's escape, for I know it must be a source of joy to you, and to your father as well."

"It is, sir, and father is a different man since, for it was hard, indeed, for his hand to sign the sentence that sent his son to the gallows."

"But I thank you also, commodore, for having been so kind to my friend here; but remember, our coming is a secret, you know, though I shall some day tell father."

"I shall not forget it, Miss Estelle, and I am more than happy to have served Miss Monte, as you say, though I do not recall in what way I have done so."

"More than I can tell you," was Ethel's low reply, as the old officer escorted his fair visitors to the door.

"Well, you are right, Ethel, for Vail & Company were the recent employers of your brother, through their agent, Laws, who disguised himself to play the part successfully."

"Yes, and I do not believe that the schooner was cut out without the knowledge of Vail & Company."

"It is some deep plot of devilry they are playing against poor Mark" and the tears came into the beautiful eyes of Ethel, while Estelle Brentford replied earnestly:

"Well, let them plot, while we counter-plot, and as we know them as they are, we hold the advantage, and will yet bring them to earth."

"But what will become of poor Mark, for I fear that he is in desperate danger, if not already—"

She paused, and Estelle cried anxiously:

"Do you fear they have killed him?"

"Yes."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A PLOT AGAINST HIM.

"RACHEL is here to see you, Ethel," and Estelle came into the library, followed by the chambermaid of the Commonwealth Inn.

"Is there any news?" eagerly asked Ethel, and Rachel said:

"A letter, miss, which was sent up to your room this afternoon, and which I took charge of."

"Here it is, miss, and I have to say that the old play actor is going away to-morrow by the stage, for I heard him tell the porter to engage him a fare in the coach for Salem, that leaves in the afternoon."

"Thank you, Rachel, and I will be at the inn in the morning."

Rachel then left, and Ethel looked at her letter.

She did not recognize the writing, but, as it was addressed to "Miss Hudson, Commonwealth Inn, Boston," she felt that it could only be from the old captain as she had written him after her arrival telling him the name she had given.

Breaking the seal she read with some little trouble the captain's wonderful specimen of penmanship.

It was as follows:

"CLIFF COTTAGE, SALEM.

"Thursday.

"MY DEAR CHILD:—

"I write you a line to say that the house, pleasant as it is, seems like a graveyard without you."

"There is no news here, and I hope you have found some clew in Boston of the poor boy's fate."

"Rumor has it here that Mark has really turned pirate, and a skipper came in to-day and reported having been brought to by the Blackbird, and asked about the sailing of certain vessels."

"And he said that he saw on the craft's deck Mark Monte."

"I asked him if he was sure, and he said he would swear to it, and more, he said he was from Boston and knew the young aristocrat, Burt Brentford, who was tried for murder and escaped the gallows, and that he saw him there also."

"I give you this for what it is worth, for it may be founded on the paper stories that were published."

"He also said there was a large crew on board, but after asking him about the sailing of certain English vessels out of Boston, and getting some papers from him, they let him go on his way without harm, and he had a valuable cargo too."

"Now, this don't look like phacy, does it?"

"All goes well at home, as it can go without you; but I'm hoping for you to come back soon and I trust with good news of our noble boy, to give the lie to all of the stories afloat against him, and which people seem anxious to make as wicked as possible."

"I am,

"Your adopted uncle,

"JOHN HUDSON.

"P. S.—Two vessels came into port yesterday which had been robbed by Malcolm Meredith, their skippers reported, so there is a big scare in town about the Red Dove Buccaneer as they call him."

Estelle Brentford had shuddered at the name of her brother, and said:

"Ethel, how strangely we are allied in this affair, for both of our brothers are banded as pirates, and both are on the same vessel."

"But you cannot believe that your brother is guilty of crime?"

"Never! not until he tells me so with his own lips will I believe it of him."

"And I have the same trust in him, slight

as I know him; but your words strengthen my confidence in poor brother Burt, for he told me he would escape, and more, he said I would one day not be ashamed of him.

"So, I believe him, Ethel, though it is true he has the black shadow of killing that officer hanging over him."

"Do not lose confidence in him, Estelle, for all may yet be proven to have been false charges against him."

"And this Captain Meredith?"

"I still have the same trust in him."

"Against all reports of his piracies?"

"Yes."

"You do indeed give me strength and hope; but it seems that this man Laws is to return home."

"Yes, and I shall go too, and in the same stage, for deeply veiled he will never know me."

"I shall hate to give you up."

"Estelle?"

"Yes."

"Your father's letter received this morning said he was to be absent yet ten days, did it not?"

"It did, so I will be terribly lonely."

"Would he care if you ran away for a few days on a visit?"

"Where?"

"Go home with me."

"Oh, Ethel, dare I do so?"

"You know best whether it would be right for you to leave."

"Oh, father gives me my way of course, for he knows I would do no wrong."

"Well, leave a note here for him telling him where you have gone, and go with me, for I would deeply love to have you, and if needed your carriage could come after you."

"I believe I will go, Ethel," and Estelle was indeed anxious to go.

She wished to see the home of Mark Monte, whom she felt that she was becoming more and more attached to each day, in spite of the clouds that were hanging over him.

She had learned to love Ethel as dearly as a sister, and the two were congenial in every respect.

She also hated to see Ethel return alone, and as her father had written that he would yet be absent for ten days, and perhaps two weeks longer, she thought she might go, leaving the home in charge of the faithful old servants, and simply letting it be known that she had gone to the country on a visit.

Of course, if Estelle felt that she ought not to go, Ethel did not wish her to do so; but she knew that her friend would do as she deemed best.

So she said:

"I would so love to have you go, Estelle, and yet I wish you to do just as you deem right."

"We could get seats in the same coach with Justin Laws, and go heavily veiled, so we can never be recognized."

"Then, too, we might get him to commit himself by a little deception on our part, which in a good cause would not be wrong, I am sure."

"Ethel, this decides me, and I will go, for we must play a part to learn from this man all that we can, and with our woman's wit, unknown to him, being conversant of the game he has been playing, it will be strange if we do not entrap him."

"Suppose I disguise myself in some way, so as to throw him wholly off his guard?"

"The very thing, and I will do the same," and the maidens seemed delighted with their little plot of adventure.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FELLOW PASSENGERS.

MR. JUSTIN LAWS was a punctual man, and so he was considerably surprised when he came down from his room, ready to take his seat in the coach for Salem, to see it rolling away from the stables.

"It will return, sir, for it's only gone to pick up some fares at a house up-town," explained the porter, to the intense satisfaction of Mr. Laws, who made it a rule never to be late when starting on a journey, and had feared that he had done so.

In fifteen minutes the coach returned, and Mr. Laws entered.

He was provoked to think that he had not secured a back seat, for it was occupied by two passengers.

As there was no one else to go, the coach

rolled away, and after it had left the town, Justin Laws took a look at his fellow-passengers.

He saw a handsome middy in a new uniform, and by his side an elderly lady who could not be his mother, for she was the picture of an old maid, with her false curls, spectacles and prim dress.

"Your servant, miss, and how d'ye do, young master?"

"We are traveling the same way, so may as well get acquainted."

"I am Justin Laws, Esquire, confidential clerk of the rich house of Ezra Vail & Co., of Salem."

"Do you go so far?"

"Oh, yes, mister, we travels on when the coach stops—interdooce me, Jimmie."

Thus appealed to, "Jimmie," who was the middy, said:

"This is my aunt, Miss Sallie Quiz, Mister Laws."

"Jimmie are right, for I be Sarah Quiz, from Portsmouth, and this be my nephew, Jimmie Hudson, a midshipman in the navy, and a likely lad, as you see."

"Be you stopping in Salem, Mr. Laws? For now we is interdooced I s'pose we can talk without impropriety, though I has been most particular all my life."

"Yes, auntie, you have been so particular you never got a husband to suit you," put in Jimmie, with a smile.

"Yes, I stop off in Salem, for my home is there," ventured Mr. Laws, wondering if he had not made a mistake in setting the tongue of the old maid to going.

"Be you married?"

Mr. Laws remembered with regret that he was very much married, and to a lady who, having buried two husbands, seemed to be trying to do as much for him.

So he replied:

"Yes, ma'm, I'm a married man."

"Any children?"

"No, ma'm."

"What a pity, for children soften one's heart so."

"How do you know, auntie?" asked Jimmie.

The old maid gave Jimmie a savage look, and returned to the attack on Justin Laws with:

"Be you well acquainted in Salem?"

"Oh, yes, ma'm, I know everybody worth the knowing."

"Maybe you know'd the Widder Swett?"

Justin Laws started.

He had married the Widow Swett, and he said emphatically:

"Oh, yes, I know her—she is now Mrs. Laws."

"Lor! do tell!"

"Do you know her?"

"I can't say as I do, but I have heard of her; but hain't you all pretty scared up jist now about them Salem pirates that is sailing in the seas?"

"We are slightly disturbed then, ma'm, and very much put out that one of our own townsmen should have turned pirate."

"I want to know: and who may he be?"

"A young man by the name of Monte—Mark Monte."

"Seems to me I heerd he were tried for murder?"

"He was tried for mutiny and murder on the seas, and was cleared; but I guess now that folks will believe that Captain Vail and myself were not mistaken in believing he had been leading a lawless life at sea."

"You say he has turned pirate now?" asked Jimmie with all a youth's delight in hearing of lawless people.

"Yes, he could have gotten command of an honest craft, for we—"

"We, who?" ventured the middy.

"Myself and Captain Vail."

"We wanted to help him, on his own account and for the sake of his sister, who is a beautiful girl, and to whom Mr. Rupert Vail is very much attached—there, I fear I have said too much: but it is known to all."

"I would like to know about it, Mister Laws, for I do love gossip," put in Miss Quiz eagerly.

"Well, we decided to help him, and place him in command of a vessel in which he could hunt down that terrible pirate, the Red Dove Buccaneer."

"But we knew," and Justin Laws always dwelt on the *we*—"that if he knew who were

his friends he would not accept mine, and so we arranged it to have him go to Boston and take command without knowing us in the matter."

"He went, and being already decided to turn pirate, he cut out the vessel, rescued that murderer, Burt Brentford from the jail and making him his lieutenant, set sail and is now cruising the seas as a buccaner."

"This is terrible," cried Miss Quiz in a tone of horror.

"I only wish I could catch him," Jimmie remarked with vigor.

"I only wish you could, my lad: but you may get a chance some day, as you are a sailor."

"But will not the whaler merchant you spoke of send another vessel after his schooner?" asked the Middy.

"Two cruisers have gone, but I doubt if the pirate stays in these parts."

Other conversation was carried on, for not only did the old maid and middy seem in a talkative mood, but Justin Laws was decidedly so, and he was anxious to make the two traveling with him feel his importance.

It was some time after nightfall when the stage rolled up to the Salem Inn, and as it was to go on after a short stop, Justin Laws bade his fellow-passengers farewell and walked rapidly away.

Hardly had he done so when the middy and his aunt also slipped out of the coach, having declined having supper at the inn, and they too hastened away.

After a short walk they saw a form ahead of them and the middy remarked:

"Yes, he is, as I thought, on his way to Hillside Hall, the home of the Vails, to report his villainy to his masters."

"I only wish we could play eavesdroppers."

"But we cannot, and we must hasten home, for I am not half so brave as I look, in the streets at this time of night."

"Come, Aunt Quiz, take my arm," and the middy led the way at a quick pace toward the harbor road.

This they followed for some distance until a light came in sight in a cottage window.

"Here is my humble home, Estelle, and you are most welcome."

"Now to give Uncle Hudson a surprise."

A knock at the door brought Captain Hudson to it, and he started at sight of his visitors, when the middy said:

"Come, uncle, give me a welcome, even if I am in a uniform, and let me introduce my friend, Miss Brentford."

"Simoons and earthquakes! but you are Ethel!"

"Why you nearly took the wind out of my sails and laid me all aback, my child," and the old sailor grasped the hand of each maiden and drew them into the room.

Then they hastened to Ethel's cozy room and soon returned as their proper selves, and Uncle Hudson, who had told the old cook to have a substantial supper ready for them, heard the story of their adventure.

"That scamp Laws is but a tool, serving his master for gold, for Ezra Vail is the head of the villainy, with his son Rupert an able and willing ally," said Captain Hudson, as he led the way into the little dining-room.

In spite of her grand surroundings at her own home, Estelle was charmed with the pretty cottage and its neat and comfortable furnishings, and she could not but admit that there was an air of refinement and luxury about it that was most charming.

She had heard the story of the old captain, and was delighted with his quaint, frank way, and looked upon him as one to be depended upon.

Until a late hour the three talked over all that had occurred, and tried to plan for the future to force Ezra Vail to the wall.

At last, without coming to any conclusion as to what was best to be done, the two girls arose to return when the old sailor said:

"I forgot to tell you, Ethel, that Meredith was off the port this morning, and robbed a whaler bound in, and in full sight of the shore."

"Did you see the vessel, uncle?" quickly asked Ethel.

"I did, and with my glass."

"What did you make her out?"

"The craft that Malcolm Meredith is captain of, or her very counterpart, my child!"

"You saw her well?"

"So well that I could see her officers to recognize them."

"Well, uncle?"

"It pains me to tell you that I saw Captain Meredith myself on his brig's deck, so there can be no doubt but that he is unworthy of you, Ethel, for at last I doubt him, having seen with my own eyes his robbery of the whaler."

Estelle looked at Ethel with a look of deepest sympathy, but while the brave girl paled at the words of the old sailor, she said firmly:

"Still I doubt, uncle, not your word, but that Malcolm Meredith is the pirate all say that he is."

As she uttered the words, there came a gentle tap upon the door that caused all to start, for it was nearly midnight.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE MIDNIGHT MESSENGER.

WHEN the tap came at the door, Ethel was naturally more startled than were Estelle and Captain Hudson.

The poor girl remembered how one night she had been sitting there with her brother, and he had been dragged away to prison, and somehow it came to her that more harm was to come.

The old sailor went to the door and opened it.

The light from within flashed upon a tall form without, and both of the maidens heard the name break from the lips of the old sailor:

"Captain Meredith!"

"Silence!" came the stern rejoinder, followed by the distinctly spoken words:

"I am here but for an instant."

"Say to Miss Monte that her brother sends her his greetings and begs that she will not doubt him against all proofs of guilt that may be brought against him."

The deep voice ceased speaking and the old sailor would have spoken, when a gust of wind blew out the light and all was darkness.

Instantly Estelle sprung to the door, but no one was there.

He had glided away in the darkness.

"It seemed almost like an apparition," said Ethel, her face very pale, as she relighted the lamp.

Estelle was silent, but impressed, and the old seaman looked a trifle nervous.

It had all been so sudden.

"Will you go with me to see if his vessel is in port?" cried Ethel, turning to the old sailor.

"Yes, I will go, but you remain here, my child."

"No, I go with you."

"And I accompany you, Ethel," said Estelle.

Wraps were hastily thrown on, and the three set forth in the darkness.

They reached a jutting point of high land, and instantly came the words from Captain Hudson:

"Look there!"

Coming out of the harbor under full sail was a beautiful brig, and she was fairly flying toward the sea.

There could be no doubt of it, for she was the Red Dove, for that vessel once seen was not to be forgotten.

She had daringly entered the port and sailed up to the town, and astern resounded shouts and the report of firearms.

"There has been mischief going on there," said the old captain.

"It is the Sea Dove," cried Ethel.

"Yes, or the Red Dove, for there can be but one such vessel afloat."

"What can it mean?" asked Estelle.

"Heaven only knows! but that was surely Malcolm Meredith who came to the cottage door."

"Could you not be mistaken, Ethel?" asked Estelle.

"No more in the man than in his vessel."

"It was Captain Malcolm Meredith," solemnly said John Hudson.

"I saw his face for an instant, and heard his voice—there was no mistake," Ethel sadly rejoined.

"But his words were hopeful."

"Strangely so, and they implied that he had seen my brother."

"Yes, for he said as much; but hear the noise in the town."

"Can he have been up to some mischief there?" asked Estelle Brentford.

"It would seem so—ha! there is a cruiser in port, for there goes her gun!" and as the old sailor spoke, the red flash and deep boom of a heavy gun were heard, while the solid shot went shrieking along past the point, and after the brig, just there beyond where the three stood, and not a cable's length away.

As though in defiance of the cruiser, and wishing to aid the aim of her gunners, a "blue light" was suddenly burned upon the brig, and the beautiful craft was revealed in a light as bright as noonday.

She was the very center of an arc of fire it seemed, and her rigging in all its delicate and graceful tracery was distinctly visible.

There stood her men at her guns, which were run out for action, and all about her decks was in perfect trim.

Her officers were at their posts, and two men held the wheel, while under a cloud of canvas the beautiful craft was dashing along at a wonderful speed.

Upon the quarter-deck, in full uniform, and with a glass in hand, stood the ruling spirit of the craft, and so distinctly was he revealed that Ethel uttered a startled cry, while the old sailor said sadly:

"Alas, my child, we can no longer doubt!"

"I do not doubt, for I recognize on yonder deck Malcolm Meredith; but I do doubt his being a pirate," said Ethel.

"You are a brave girl, and true as steel, Ethel, and I only hope your beautiful trust will be rewarded."

"But that is the officer I caught a glance of at the cottage door half an hour ago, and he surely has been in some mischief up in the town; but I glory in your trust in one you love," and Ethel turned her gaze once more upon the brig, just as the blue light faded out and all was darkness.

But it was again illumined by a red glare, and the booming of the cruiser's guns came fast and loud.

"The cruiser is in chase," almost shouted the old sailor, as he could see a fine vessel-of-war coming along along at a slapping pace, crowding on sail as she did so, and also keeping up a rapid fire from her bow guns.

"Oh, she will sink the brig, for she is so large and terrible looking!" cried Ethel.

"She is also very fast; but I knew not that there was a cruiser in port, so she must have come in after nightfall, and the brig run in upon her before she knew of her presence," said John Hudson.

But if those on the point feared for the brig, her commander seemed to have no such dread, as he again burned a blue light, as though to show his large enemy just where he was.

The guns of the sloop-of-war were now firing rapidly, and it could be seen by the three watchers on the point, told on the brig.

Still her crew stood calmly at their guns, returning no fire, while her commander was pacing his quarter-deck seemingly with utter indifference to all danger.

"That sloop sails like the wind," said Captain Hudson, as she swept by the point, covered now from deck to trucks with white wings to aid her flight.

"But the brig gains," added Ethel, whose eyes were upon the leading vessel.

"You are right, my child, and that man knows what his beautiful vessel can do, so has no fear."

"But it was Malcolm Meredith."

"Of that there is no doubt, Uncle Hudson."

"And what can he have been up to?"

"He came to deliver a message to me from brother Mark, was discovered and had to fly."

"Why did he run up to the town, my child?"

"Perhaps to see Wanda the Witch, for he visited her when here before."

Seeing that Ethel would not be convinced that Malcolm Meredith was guilty, as some charged him with being, the old sailor said no more, and after watching the chase far out to sea, the three turned their steps to the cottage.

Then Ethel said:

"Uncle, I see that you doubt Captain Meredith, and Estelle, I fear you also do; but I ask you both to trust him until he is proven guilty."

"Egad, child, I'll do it," said John Hudson, while Estelle replied:

"Ethel, your beautiful trust inspires me with the same confidence in the man that you feel against all seeming proofs of his being a pirate."

"I thank you both; but it is two o'clock so let us retire," said Ethel wearily, for in her own heart there was just the shadow of a doubt that her lover could never prove his innocence, though she would not admit it even to herself.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WORK WELL DONE.

WHEN Justin Laws left the stage, and the two persons whom he believed to be what they represented themselves, he walked rapidly along in the direction of the elegant home of Ezra Vail.

He knew that he would find the old merchant in his library, and after a long ride, a glass of fine brandy and a fragrant cigar, after a "snack," would be very acceptable.

These he was sure to get he well knew.

The door was opened by the stately butler, and the confidential clerk was ushered at once into the library.

"Why, Laws, you are as welcome as the flowers of spring," cried Ezra Vail, and he added:

"When did you arrive?"

"I came from the stage-coach here, sir."

"Then you are hungry, so shall have supper," and giving the necessary orders, the merchant then told the butler to send Master Rupert to the library.

After his supper Justin Laws felt refreshed, especially as he had had several glasses of brandy.

Then the butler was dismissed for the night, Rupert Vail came into the library, and greeting the confidential clerk, the three sat down for a talk.

"Well, Laws, you are a trump," said the elder merchant.

Justin Laws was pleased, for the praise coincided with his own very excellent opinion of himself.

But he said modestly:

"I hope I did my duty, Captain Vail."

"Fully, sir, and I wish you to run over the facts for us."

"Well, sir, I bought the schooner Blackbird, as you know, and in your name, though secretly as you requested."

"I got her a fine crew through tavern-keepers, and she was in perfect trim."

"I took to disguises in all I did, taking one part and then another, and doing what I must say was clever secret service work."

"And you rescued the prisoner, Brentford?"

"Oh, yes, as I wrote you."

"On the terms I demanded?"

"Yes, sir, that he should take command of the vessel when at sea, and make Mark Monte a prisoner."

"I see, that was perfectly right, but Monte suspected nothing?"

"Oh, no, sir, for I had my disguises in my room, put on that of a respectable old gentleman, with gray wig, beard and spectacles and went myself to the hotel and left word that Mr. Ford Burton would call for Captain Mark Monte, when he arrived."

"I did so, after all was arranged, and he believed me to be the dear friend of his late father."

"So I got him on board the schooner without trouble."

"And the real captain?"

"He was already there."

"But what a clever escape you planned; but who was the priest?"

"I was the first one, sir, and then, pretending to go away, I got the man I hired to plan the part."

"Why, Laws, you are a clever scamp indeed."

"I have not half appreciated you; but this man Slick seemed to be a shrewd one."

"He is, sir, and takes the situation like a man."

"And what of this fellow Brentford?"

"Captain Vail, he is as much of a man as one generally meets with, and I was delighted with him."

"And he should be with you, for you saved his neck."

"Not I, sir, but you, for I was but the humble instrument to carry out your plot."

"And you carried it out boldly and well, Mr. Laws," put in Rupert Vail, and this praise from the junior member of the firm of Vail & Co. made Justin Laws blush like a school-girl.

"So the ship sailed without a hitch?"

"Yes, sir; and she is the craft to do good work, under the captain you have selected for her."

"I felt that if I saved a man from the gallows, gave him a well-armed, fleet craft, and only asked slight favors in return, he would be the one to serve me well."

"Yes, sir; and he will do so, I feel assured."

"But he understands all about Mark Monte?"

"I gave him your sealed instructions, sir."

"And he is to obey them to the letter?"

"I see no reason why he should do otherwise."

"Well, Laws, you are sure no suspicion fell upon you?"

"Not an atom, sir, though it had to come out that you were secretly the owner of the schooner Blackbird, which was supposed to have been run off with; but then it seemed natural that you should wish to strike back at the Nemesis who has done you such harm."

"True, true, and I am glad it is looked upon that way."

"And I explained that you were secretly anxious to serve Mark Monte, whom you were much pleased with, and regretted having had tried the charges that were not proven, so had had another offer him the command of the schooner, and he had wronged you by cutting her out and making a pirate of her."

"Better and better, Laws; but accept a bed here to-night, for it is late."

"No, thank you, sir, for I wrote Mrs. Laws I would return, so must go."

"I understand. She is one who must be obeyed."

"But fill up a good-night cup."

This Justin Laws, already half-seas-over, did, and then he wended his way to his own snug little home.

The widow he had married had been a boarding-house landlady, and there were some who said she had wedded Justin Laws *nolens volens* as far as he was concerned.

From the day she became Mrs. Laws, she was boss, and she made it very lively for him, for in fact, he was a sadly hen-pecked man.

She had watched the time when the stage was due, and as he came not she began to turn sour.

As two hours passed away, she managed to get into a humor that would bring terror to the heart of poor Laws.

Fortunately for him, he had "braced up" with sundry glasses of brandy, elated by his success, and as his employer had handed him a very neat little check for his services, he was in a mood to feel his own importance.

Could she believe her ears, thought Mrs. Laws, when she heard a voice singing, and recognized it as her husband's?

How dare he sing, and at that hour of the night?

Forgetting what all the neighbors thought of her, she began to fear what they would think of him, and she met him at the hall-door.

Justin Laws was drunk, there was no denying that fact, and he greeted his wife with a war-whoop, a double shuffle, and tried to embrace her with intoxicated affection.

"Justin Laws! how dare you?"

"Hooray! I'm back again, Widder!"

He always called her "Widder" when he was in a very good humor.

"Justin Laws, you are a fool!"

"Not such a fool as you think, my dear; come, I'm a trump, for the boss says so. Come, welcome with a kiss your lord and master."

Her "lord and master!"

This was too much for Mrs. Laws to stand.

The worm was evidently beginning to turn against the iron heel.

She must stamp out at once this germ of independence.

And she did, for Justin Laws felt himself seized by bony fingers, and he was yanked about in a manner that made every bone in his body rattle.

How it would have ended who can tell; but suddenly the boom of a heavy gun shook the house, and then came another, with shouts and yells in the town, and the ringing of the alarm bell on the jail.

It was just on the verge of the breaking out of the war with England, and British vessels were becoming as great terrors as pirates, so Mrs. Laws cried in wild fright:

"Go and defend your country, Justin Laws, for the Britishers have captured the town."

But Justin Laws oblivious to the call of patriotism lay upon the floor where his spouse had thrown him, snoring loudly.

CHAPTER XL.

THE RED DOVE FLAG.

CAPTAIN EZRA VAIL was just "turning in" for the night, satisfied with his wicked work, as carried out so successfully by his hireling Justin Laws, when he was startled by the thunder of heavy guns.

He and his son had chatted awhile after Laws's departure, and then, with another "night-cap" had separated to go to their respective rooms.

Rupert heard the guns as he was dropping off to sleep, and he sprung to his feet and hastily dressed.

He was soon in his father's rooms, and the servants were running about, also aroused by the firing.

Wild shouts came from the town, and the coachman was told to hastily get the carriage around to the front door.

"What does it mean, father?" cried Rupert.

"Some English vessel has doubtless anticipated the declaration of war and run in and attacked the town," was the answer.

"It may be a pirate, for no British commander would dare strike a blow until war was declared."

"He may have later news than we have, my son."

"I still think it must be a buccaneer caught robbing, and has fired on the townspeople; but here is the carriage," and Rupert led the way to the piazza as the carriage wheels were heard in the gravel drive before the door.

As the father and son reached the carriage a man dashed up breathless from running.

"Captain Vail, the Red Dove has been in port and the whaler's Nemesis has robbed your office," cried the man.

Captain Vail uttered a groan, and no wonder, for he had twenty thousand dollars in his iron box at the office.

Springing into the carriage he bade the coachman drive with all haste down into the town.

Rupert followed him, the door went to with a bang, and the man who had brought the startling news sprung up behind.

Away dashed the vehicle, and it was in ten minutes at the office door of Vail & Company.

A constable stood there, lantern in hand, and a huge crowd had gathered, many of them armed, and scores carrying lanterns, so that the scene was a picturesque one, while the booming of the heavy guns of the cruiser, as she flew seaward, echoed through the town.

But neither father nor son saw the picturesqueness of the scene, and at once entered their office followed by a wild mocking laugh.

"It is Wanda, the Witch, sir, and she has been saying bitter things ag'in' yer," said the constable.

"Curse her! but what has happened, Constable Carr?"

"Well, sir, I came on at midnight, and I seen up the harbor an armed brig, which Tatum, whom I believed, said came in a short while before."

"As I come along the shore I seen a big sloop-of-war also at anchor, but Tatum had spoke of her, and it set me to wondering."

"Then I strolls up this street, and just as I come in sight of your office, I seen a light there, and a number of men."

"I at once gave the alarm, as the light

was put out, and the relief watch heard it as they were going to turn in and came on the run."

"I heard a voice say:

"To the boats, men, for the work is done!"

"But, remember, no firing of arms except in self-defense."

"Then I knowed as how something was going wrong, and as a party of men left your office door, carrying something on oars that looked like a body, I called out to them to halt."

"But they walked on and I called out again, and, as no notice was taken of me, I fired into the crowd."

"One man fell, and yet they moved on, carrying him with them, and as the relief then came up, with several citizens, we ran upon them."

"But they beat us back, though they did not fire a shot only, used their oars."

"They reached their boat, sprung in, and headed for the brig I had seen further up the harbor."

"At the same time, I seen it coming down under full sail, and it picked them up, just as I hailed the sloop-of-war."

"An officer replied, and I told him the brig was the pirate, Meredith, of the Red Dove, and that he had been robbing the town."

"Then the drum beat to quarters on the sloop, and the sails were set, and the anchor gotten up in mighty quick time, while she started in chase."

"Why did she not give the accursed pirate a broadside?" savagely said Captain Vail.

"Because, sir, the pirate ran in between her and the town, and she dared not do so; but soon as she got her bow pointed seaward she opened hot and heavy, as you heard, and the daring buccaneer set a blue light to show him just where he was."

"The infamous outlaw! But will the sloop not catch him?"

"That remains to be told; sir, when the sloop comes back."

"What sloop was it?"

"Don't know, sir, but she came in after dark, and not far astern of the brig, I guess."

"You have done well, constable; but now bring your lantern, and let us see what that infernal buccaneer has done."

"You are sure it was the Red Dove?"

"Oh, yes, sir, for I recognized Captain Meredith myself, for they had lanterns, and when the blue light was burned, folks along the shore as came in said they saw a blue flag at the peak, with a blood-red dove in the center, and gold spread wings in the corner."

"That is his flag, so there can be no doubt."

"Now to see what deviltry he has been up to."

This was very readily discovered, for the iron box in Ezra Vail's private office, containing twenty thousand dollars in money, and some valuable papers, had been taken.

"Look here, father!"

Rupert pointed, as he spoke, to a miniature flag that lay upon the desk of the merchant.

It was a blue silk flag, with a red dove worked in the center, and gold wings in the four corners:

To it was attached a card, upon which was written in a bold hand:

"Captain Malcolm Meredith, the whalers' Nemesis, and commander of the brig, Red Dove, presents his compliments to Captain Ezra Vail, and begs to leave his card as a token of his visit, and when he promises shall by no means be the last!"

"My God! I have been robbed of an enormous sum."

"Rupert!"

"Yes, father!"

"I shall at once put a craft out to hunt down this pirate, and you shall command her."

"You are very kind, father," was the reply, but the words and tone of the young man seemed to indicate that at least he did not appreciate such kindness.

Then the two left the office, locked the door, which the pirates had opened with a skeleton key, and drove to the house of Justin Laws.

When that worthy discovered his master,

and his son standing over him, he became instantly sober, and was told to come to the captain's house early in the morning, as there was more work for him to do.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE TELL-TALE WRITING.

WHEN the day dawned in Salem the town was wild with excitement.

Very few had seen the cruiser come in under the cover of the night, and no one knew what vessel it was.

And only the constable who discovered the pirates, seemed to have seen the brig.

That vessel had come quickly into the harbor, run up to a secluded anchorage, and then sent a boat's crew ashore to do their lawless work.

The cruiser had evidently not known of the presence of the buccaneer, or, if seeing her, thought she was all right, as she was at anchor off the town.

The cruiser had been given the alarm by the constable, but the brig was dashing by then between her guns and the town, so she could only follow the daring rover.

At an early hour, a very early hour, for he was anxious to escape his wife's tongue, Justin Laws had gone to the Vail mansion.

He found father and son already up, and he was asked at once if he could find the schooner Blackbird.

"Through the agent, sir, in Boston, with whom it was arranged we would do all business of selling booty."

"Well, get ready to go to Boston, and to stay there until the agent hears from Captain Brentford."

"Pardon, sir, but you know he has taken the name of Captain Monte."

"Ah, yes, I had forgotten, and I am glad to see that you left nothing undone."

"Thank you, sir."

"When you see, or can communicate with Captain Monte, tell him to devote every energy to the capture of this pirate craft Red Dove, for she is worth a fortune, having vast sums of gold on board."

"Tell him to keep her captain prisoner, if not killed in action, until *you* come to see him hanged, with some friends of yours, and my son and myself will follow your example, disguise ourselves and go to see him strung up."

"I understand, sir."

"Tell him to give up all else and to run down the Red Dove."

"I will, sir."

"Now take a toddy, for you look used up, then have breakfast with us and go by special carriage to Boston."

"Yes, sir," and an hour after Justin Laws was reclining in the soft cushions of a vehicle as it rolled away toward Boston, with his luggage, which had not left the stage office, strapped on behind.

He had not dared return home, so had written a line to his wife that he had been called away at once, but would not forget her orders, upon arriving in the city, to get her a black satin dress, velvet bonnet and some laces.

These things Mrs. Laws had ordered six months before, but she was pretty certain of receiving them this time, for her husband knew there would be "war declared" at once on his return.

And old Captain Hudson had made an early visit to the town, to return to the cottage for breakfast completely full of news.

Ethel and Estelle greeted him pleasantly, and though a trifle pale, they looked very bewitching in their morning dresses.

The sailor soon told his story, which was in effect about what Constable Carr had made known to Captain Vail.

Estelle glanced at Ethel with a look that meant: "Do you still trust him?"

Ethel then asked quietly: "Uncle Hudson, you say he left a card?"

"Yes, Ethel, with a little Red Dove flag."

"The card had written on it what you told me?"

"Yes."

"Do you think it possible to get that card?"

"No, my dear; I do not see how it can be done, for Captain Vail took it."

"Estelle."

"Yes, Ethel."

"Do you wish to go with me to make a visit?"

"Certainly."

"It is upon Captain Vail."

"Ah! and why do you go there, Ethel?"

"I wish to see that card."

"I understand you, I think. You wish to compare the writing on it with some that you have of Captain Meredith's."

"Yes, for I have a few verses in my album which he wrote, and also a communication which he sent me by Wanda the Witch, and which I told you of."

"Yes, I will go with you, Ethel," and an hour after breakfast Captain Ezra Vail and his son Rupert were surprised to see the two maidens enter their private office.

They were both struck, by the beauty of Ethel's companion and wondered who she could be, and father and son rose with marked politeness.

But Ethel had a motive in coming, and lost no time in making it known.

She did not introduce them to Estelle, but bowed coldly to both and said:

"Captain Vail, I learned of your misfortune this morning, and it seems that the rich and powerful can also meet with reverses; but I learn that you have a card with a message on it in the handwriting of Captain Meredith?"

"I have, Miss Monte."

"I would like to see that card, if you please."

Rupert Vail turned to his desk when his father said quickly:

"I have it at home in my private desk, Miss Monte, and when we go home to dinner will get it and have my son bring it to you."

"You could not send for it, sir?"

"No, for I allow no one to go into my desk."

"May I ask why you wish to see it?"

"Curiosity, sir, a woman's prerogative," was the answer.

"I will let my son bring it to you."

"I am sorry to give Mr. Vail such trouble, so perhaps you would be good enough to send it?"

"No; for I prefer to let it go only through my son, or my son's hands."

"As you please, sir—good-morning," and the two maidens left the office, while Rupert said:

"Father, I have the card here now, and—"

"Don't be a fool, my son, for you are my son, but have your wits about you."

"Hand me that book yonder marked 'Captains' Letters' and bring me that pirate Meredith's card."

Rupert did as he was told, and for a long while the father and son were engaged in some work that seemed to interest them greatly.

In the mean time Ethel and Estelle retraced their way homeward, the regard of all eyes, and the town was so crowded, and in such a state of excitement they were very glad to get back once more to the seclusion of Cliff Cottage.

Soon after dinner the old servant announced "Captain Rupert Vail."

With a beating heart, Ethel entered the little parlor, accompanied by Estelle, but outwardly she was calm.

Rupert Vail looked his very best, and had driven to the cottage in his own stylish turnout, with coachman in livery.

He cast an admiring glance at Estelle, whom again Ethel did not present him to, and who showed that she came merely as the friend of Ethel.

But he looked as though he would have preferred to have seen Ethel alone.

"You have brought the card, Captain Vail?"

"I have, Miss Ethel—here it is."

He took from his pocket, as he spoke, the very pretty miniature flag with the card attached, and handed it to her.

"What an exceedingly pretty flag!" said Ethel, with no trace of excitement, and she handed it to Estelle, while she unpinned the card.

As though to secure a better light, she walked to the window, thus turning her back to Rupert Vail.

And it was well that she did, as her face turned to the hue of marble when she glanced at the writing, and in a whisper came from her lips the words:

"My God! it is his writing!"

"It is Captain Malcolm Meredith's writing, Miss Ethel," said Rupert Vail, who had overheard the whispered words.

"So I said, sir."

"Meredith the Buccaneer!"

"I said not so, sir, but that the writing was that of my friend, Captain Meredith."

"I thank you, sir," and the card was returned with a bow which Rupert Vail could not but understand meant that there was no more to be said, and so he took his leave.

CHAPTER XLII.

DOUBT AND HOPE.

AFTER the departure of Rupert Vail from Cliff Cottage, Ethel Monte almost broke down.

It was certain that she had received a severe shock in the recognition of her lover's writing, and but for the presence of Estelle she might have given up entirely.

"Estelle, did you read that writing?" she asked excitedly.

"Yes, Ethel."

"Did you note it particularly?"

"I did, particularly so."

"And you observed any peculiarity about it?"

"I must confess that I did, for the words seemed to be all run together, though the handwriting was bold and attractive."

"Now look at this, please."

She handed to Estelle what she had of her lover's writing.

She saw Estelle start as she saw it, and asked nervously:

"What do you think?"

"I regret to say that I would think this and the card written by the same person."

"Oh, Heaven! what am I to believe?"

"And yet he bade me trust him."

Her grief was so deep that Estelle said in a low voice of sympathy:

"And I would do so, Ethel."

"Give me a straw of hope and I will grasp it."

"You mean for me to trust him?"

"Yes, Ethel."

"But why after this damning proof?"

Estelle was silent and after a moment Ethel continued:

"Estelle, I know that Uncle Hudson and you both believe him guilty and think me stubborn, after all that has passed."

"He came here last night and you heard his words, to trust in my brother against all seeming proof."

"I saw him then, and I saw him again on the deck of the vessel I know to have been his brig."

"He was flying out to sea, returning no fire which the cruiser poured upon him."

"He even revealed himself on the deck by the moonlight."

"To-day we find that he landed and robbed Vail & Company's office, and he left a card with his name upon it."

"I have seen the writing and it is his, and now I say must I still trust on?"

"Ethel, you ask for a straw of hope, and I will try and give you one."

"Do, I beg of you."

"As I understand it, Captain Rupert Vail has sought your hand in marriage?"

"Yes."

"His father appears determined that he shall wed you?"

"Yes."

"They have tried to force you into this marriage?"

"They have."

"And you can see no reason beyond his love for you?"

"I cannot even understand why he should love me, for I have hated him and shown it to him."

"He knows that you are not rich, and he is enormously wealthy."

"Yes."

"Now, Ethel, though I can well understand how any honorable man can love you, I cannot comprehend how such a man as Rupert Vail appears to be can wish to marry one who is poor and hates him, taking your beauty out of the consideration, and to win you persecutes you and your brother."

"Now he knows you are engaged to Captain Meredith, so he naturally wishes to make him out a pirate, and as his father and himself have surely entrapped your brother, they

would do all in their power to prove Meredith a pirate.

"Now to the point I wish you to see.

"Did you notice when you asked for that card Rupert Vail turned to his desk?"

"Yes."

"As though to get it?"

"Yes."

"His father quickly checked him in what he meant to do, and the son drew some papers over something that lay upon his desk, and now that I have seen the little Red Dove flag, it looked to me as though that was what he wished to hide."

"But he said that it was at home."

"So he said; but why should it be there, when naturally he would have it at the office?"

"That is true."

"Now my straw of hope is that he saw your motive, to see the hand-writing on the card, and if it was not Captain Meredith's to forge his hand on a card and send it to you."

"Why, Estelle! you are a perfect detective."

"Has he any of Captain Meredith's writing?"

"Yes; for I know Malcolm Meredith wrote him when he was here in regard to attaching his vessel to his whaling fleet."

"Then I believe I am right."

"God bless you, my dear Estelle, you do indeed give me a straw of hope; but can we not find out if this is so?"

"Do you know any one whom you could ask to come here, who doubtless saw the card as it was left by the—by Captain Meredith?"

"Uncle Hudson said that Wanda the Witch was there."

"I will ask him."

The old sailor was enjoying his pipe in his room, when Ethel called to him and asked if he thought Wanda the Witch had seen the writing on the card left with the Red Dove flag in Ezra Vail's office.

"She did, for she laughed mockingly at Captain Vail, and forced her way into the office with the few that went in and made the discovery, so Constable Carr said."

"Come, Estelle, do you wish to take a sail with me?" and Ethel's face brightened.

Estelle was more than willing, and soon after the two girls were in Ethel's skiff, and the latter was at the tiller and making for the home of Wanda the Witch.

That odd woman was seated in front of her cabin, but greeted them pleasantly, for her, when they arrived.

"Good Mother Wanda, this is my best friend, Miss Estelle Brentford, who is visiting me for a few days, and we have come to have a little talk with you," said Ethel.

"Sit down, my pretty ones, for you are both pretty, though I was once your match; but my beauty was my ruin, and it made me what I am to-day."

"Perhaps had I been less beautiful, I would have married some honest farmer lad, and been happy to-day as the mother of children."

"But listen to the old fool Wanda talk—you wanted to ask me something, Ethel?"

"Yes."

"About the visit of the pirate last night?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is it you wish to know?"

"You were up in the town?"

"I was, for the guns alarmed me, and I sailed over."

"You were there when Captain Vail came?"

"Yes, and his son with him; and oh, how it hurt them to lose their gold!"

"They were surely robbed?"

"No doubt of that, for the iron box was gone."

"Did you go into the office?"

"I did."

"With Captain Vail?"

"Along with him, Officer Carr, and others."

"You saw the Red Dove flag?"

"Yes, it was on his table."

"Did you see the card?"

"I did."

"And read it?"

"Yes."

"Did you particularly notice the writing?"

"Yes."

"Was it the same hand as this?" and Edith handed out the card she had received by the witch on a former occasion from Malcolm Meredith.

"No, this is Malcolm Meredith's hand."

"I know it, good Wanda; but was that on the card the same?"

"No, it was far different."

"You remember what it said?"

Wanda repeated the words exactly.

"And you are sure that he did not write the card?"

"Of course not, for he was not here last night."

"He was, and at the cottage!"

Wanda started, and looked fixedly at Ethel.

Then she said:

"Tell me the truth, girl."

She was told all, and both maidens saw that the witch was deeply moved.

At last she said bluntly:

"Leave me now, for I must think."

"I will see you again."

They departed, and Wanda muttered to herself:

"Can the boy have deceived me, after all?"

"Is he really the Buccaneer of the Red Dove Flag?"

CHAPTER XLIII.

WAR-CLOUDS.

As the skiff returned to Cliff Cottage, a large vessel was seen standing into the harbor.

"It is a sloop-of-war," said Ethel, who was thoroughly posted on all rigs of vessels.

"The one that pursued the brig last night, doubtless," responded Estelle, and as the beautiful vessel drew nearer she continued:

"I know that vessel, Ethel; it is the Sea Sentinel, and her first lieutenant is a particular friend of mine, and I have often been on board."

"But for the sorrows upon us both about our respective brothers, it would be pleasant to send my card to Lieutenant Vassar and other officers I know; but no, it is best not, I guess."

"Do as you deem best, Estelle, for I do not wish you to devote yourself wholly to me, my sweet friend."

"Ah, Ethel, what heart have I with the doubt hanging over my poor brother's career, to seek pleasure for myself."

"No, Ferd Vassar is a noble fellow, and at one time I half thought I was in love with him; but if we need aid or advice, then I will send for him, and I could trust him as a brother."

"It is pleasant indeed to have such a friend, Estelle; but the sloop is a beautiful vessel."

"Yes, one of the finest and fleetest in the navy."

"Yet she did not catch the brig."

"So it seems, and if there is a shadow of doubt about her commander, I am heartily glad of it."

"See, the Sea Sentinel has come to anchor not far from your home, and in the very center of the harbor, as though to keep guard."

The young girls had now reached the cottage, and seated upon the little porch watched the glorious sunset.

They saw a boat leave the side of the sloop-of-war, as soon as she had dropped anchor and pull for the town, and just at twilight Captain Hudson appeared walking at a very brisk pace for him.

"Uncle Hudson has news I am sure," said Ethel, with an effort to control herself.

"You dear girl, how brave you are, and how I hope you will soon be out of all your troubles," said Estelle sweetly.

Captain Hudson had now approached and he called out with some excitement:

"It's to be war, young ladies, and with the Britishers, for we Americans are going to hit back."

"The sloop-of-war Sea Sentinel has arrived, and is to be the guard to our port, and it is said that a battery of heavy guns is to be mounted on the point over yonder, and then let the British come on."

"Is not that the same vessel that went in chase of the brig last night, Captain Hudson?" Estelle Brentford asked.

"It is, miss, and the officer who came

ashore reported that she out-ran them easily, and in spite of their fire never returned a shot; but if I was a younger man I would go to sea again on a privateer to fight the British."

"No, Uncle Hudson, you must remain here to defend me; but you say the sloop is to remain here?"

"Yes, she is to make this her port and cruise in the vicinity."

"The fort is to be built at once, and there will be stirring times in Salem town."

"My poor brother! how he would like to be an officer in the service of his country."

"Estelle, I almost fear I shall never see him again."

"Do not get blue, my dear Ethel, after having been so brave, for I have strong hopes that all will yet come well," was Estelle's cheering response.

Then they went in to tea and as they came out Estelle came face to face with a tall form in uniform, who had just stepped up to the door.

"Lieutenant Vassar!"

"Miss Estelle! you here."

Their hands met in the grasp of real friendship, and turning Estelle presented Ethel and the old captain.

"Now explain yourself, Sir Lieutenant, and why I find you here in Salem town," she said with a smile.

"I think an explanation is due from you too, Miss Estelle; but I am here with my vessel as a guard, for we expect trouble to begin at once with England, and in fact there has already been fighting at sea and some of our merchant craft taken by British cruisers."

"But I landed here to place a guard for the night on the point, to watch for incoming vessels and signal the sloop, as we have reason to expect a visit from a British cruiser."

"I came to the cottage here to ask permission, and lo! I find you."

"Is there more you would know?"

"Yes, why did you not catch that buccaneer last night?"

"Ah! he caught us all aback, for we were not looking for a foe in the harbor, and to have given him a broadside would have been to shake the town up terribly and kill innocent people."

"We gave chase, and he sailed faster than any craft the Sea Sentinel ever tried speed with."

"He was Meredith the Buccaneer, I heard."

"So reported, and I guess truly, for his vessel is a brig; yes, and a schooner, too, I have heard, when he wishes to make her so, and she is said to possess wonderful speed."

"Now tell me why I find you here?"

"I am on a visit to my best of friends, Miss Monte; and, Lieutenant Vassar, I am glad you are here, for we are both in trouble, and you are such a dear good fellow and can help us."

"You have but to command me, Miss Estelle, as you know, as also has Miss Monte; but perhaps I can guess something of your trouble, for I was in Boston when the schooner Blackbird was cut out."

"And, Ferd Vassar, let me tell you that Captain Mark Monte no more cut that schooner out to make a pirate of her than I did, and my unfortunate brother Burt did not go to sea to sail under a black flag."

"They are gone, and infamy is cast upon them, but there is some strange mystery in all this, and you must help us to fathom it, for Ethel will trust you as I do."

Estelle spoke almost impressively, and as Ethel gazed into the resolute, noble face of the handsome young officer, she felt that the praise bestowed upon him had not been undeserved, and she said:

"I will be most happy to have the advice and friendship of Lieutenant Vassar."

"And you shall have both, Miss Monte, and I will do all in my power to aid you; but let me first dispose of my men by asking if I may put a few men in the high, wooded point above here?"

"I will give the permission with pleasure, Lieutenant Vassar," was the reply of Ethel, and the young officer went out to place his guards, after which he returned to the cottage, and was told the whole story of Mark Monte's persecutions, and Estelle also made known to him how she had visited her

brother in prison, and all that he had said to her.

The disguises of Justin Laws, and his seeming secret service for Captain Ezra Vail, were also told, and Lieutenant Ferd Vassar having listened with the deepest attention, said earnestly:

"I agree with you, Miss Monte, that there is a mystery to fathom, and that your brother may be the victim of a cruel persecution; but I cannot understand why these whaler merchants should be so determined to get him out of their way, and there must be something back of it all which we do not see."

"But I will keep your secret and see if I cannot find some clew to the mystery," and promising to dine the next day at Cliff Cottage, Ferd Vassar left his fair friends and returned on board of his vessel; but he left both Estelle and Ethel happier for his visit, and far more hopeful for the future, though he would not venture an opinion that Malcolm Meredith was not the Red Dove rover, for under all circumstances he feared that he was and felt deep sympathy for the maiden who he could see loved the man of mystery devotedly in spite of the brand of outlawry upon him.

CHAPTER XLIV.

VISITORS AT CLIFF COTTAGE.

THE schooner Blackbird was a beauty.

In spite of her lawless career she was an object to admire, and to win a sailor's merit.

Her outlines were perfect and as finely drawn as a king's yacht.

She was so trim she looked quite small, and it was only when she was skurrying along under canvas enough to run under most vessels of her size that she appeared to be what she was, a craft of ample tonnage for deep-sea sailing.

Her hull was graceful, her bows knife-like, and her stern narrow and lean.

But her depth and her beam amidships helped her to carry sail, and gave her ample room for her guns, of which she carried three eighteens to a side, with a bow and stern pivot of large caliber.

She had been a slaver, and was built for a craft to run cargo of blacks from Africa to Cuba, but had been caught by a cruiser under whose guns she ran in a fog.

Sold in Boston, to give her captors prize money, she had been bought by Ezra Vail, who said he might have use for her some day.

That day came when he decided to use her as a means of adding to his fortune and getting rid of Mark Monte at the same time.

Slippery as an eel himself, though considered the very acme of honor, he suspected every one, and the result was he decided to win a man to serve him faithfully by saving him from the gallows and giving him a chance to make money by piracy.

He selected Burt Brentford as the man, and so managed that if the young man was caught and hanged as a pirate he, Ezra Vail, would never be known to be the partner in crime of the buccaneer captain.

Never doing anything by halves, Ezra Vail determined to fit up the schooner in every respect, and his hireling, Justin Laws, did the work well.

He selected a crew of seventy men, and there was nothing wanting to add to the craft or her men and fittings when she sailed.

If successful, then Ezra Vail would reap a golden harvest from piracies.

If unsuccessful as a pirate, he would at least destroy the man in the way of his son to gain an enormous inheritance left by Lola Rutledge, the condemned murderess, to her children, Mark and Ethel Monte.

But Ezra Vail had an enemy that was doing him serious injury.

And that enemy was the outlaw known as the Red Dove Buccaneer.

He had gone to the whaling-grounds and robbed his vessels of gold.

He had caught the whalers on their way home, and even in sight of port had overhauled them and forced them to pay toll.

He had not used force unless compelled to do so, but he had carried his point in every particular and had won the name of the whalers' Nemesis.

And this man, Captain Malcolm Meredith, had sailed into Salem port one day as an honest sailor.

He had sprung from his vessel and saved Ethel Monte from drowning, and after remaining in port for some time, had gone away, her pledged lover.

He had gone, so he said, to join Ezra Vail's fishing fleet and bring back a cargo.

But after some time passed he had appeared as a pirate.

And, growing bolder, he had entered Salem Harbor by night and robbed the office of Ezra Vail & Company.

No one else had been harmed, or robbed. This looked as though he had some cause for revenge against the rich whaling firm.

So it was that Ezra Vail decided to have the commander of the Blackbird notified that he must hunt down the buccaneer craft Red Dove.

Her capture would satiate Ezra Vail's revenge against Malcolm Meredith, who naturally must be hanged, and the vessel was doubtless a rich prize, for all of the buccaneer's gold must be on board.

And hence the sending of Justin Laws to Boston to see "Captain Monte," as Ezra Vail had told Burt Brentford he must be known.

With Mark Monte believed to be a buccaneer, with Malcolm Meredith hanged, and Ethel Monte the wife of Rupert Vail, Captain Ezra Vail, the arch-villain, would be a happy man, for he never allowed his conscience to trouble him.

And for these ends he strove, and he was determined to win.

He had intended to purchase a craft and fit her out as a privateer for Rupert, and thus capture the Red Dove; but Rupert Vail had not taken kindly to the idea.

"I might get killed just in the moment of success, and I am on the threshold of life, father, while you have turned on the path to the grave, so why do you not take command of the privateer?"

So had asked Rupert Vail, and his father had dropped the subject with remarkable promptness.

Thus matters stood when the American sloop-of-war Sea Sentinel came into Salem Harbor as a guard, and the rumors of war were flying wildly about the country.

That any one suspected him of wrongdoing, Ezra Vail had not the slightest idea, and outside of the three unworthy plotters, himself, Rupert and Justin Laws, Ethel Monte had been the only one to believe him guilty of treachery.

Now Estelle Brentford, Captain Hudson, lastly, Lieutenant Ferd Vassar had been let into the secret, and Ezra Vail, while setting a trap for others, little dreamed that he might be baiting it with himself.

The day after the arrival of the Sea Sentinel, all was excitement in town.

A coaster had arrived with heavy guns, and another with several hundred workmen, and work was at once begun to make a water battery to protect the harbor.

A signal-station was established on the wooded hill but a short distance from Cliff Cottage, and Ethel felt that her home was no longer isolated and unprotected.

The able-bodied citizens of Salem were organized into a company of soldiers, and several others were formed of old men and youths as a home guard, while rich men began to build vessels that would serve as privateers to grow rich off of the commerce of Great Britain.

Rumor had come in of several engagements at sea between American and English cruisers, and merchant craft were beginning to hug the shore for fear of being captured.

In the midst of all the excitement two whalers had come in and their captains reported having been chased, overhauled and robbed by the fleet pirate craft Red Dove.

Thus the matter stood when one afternoon a carriage drove up to Cliff Cottage and Judge Brentford stepped out and was met by his daughter and Ethel.

"I tried to get along without you, Estelle, for I knew from your letters you ought to remain with your sweet friend here; but the house was so dismal I decided to come after you and carry Miss Ethel back with us," said the judge, who was at once drawn toward the beautiful and friendless girl.

But Ethel declared she could not go, and begged the judge to at least spend a couple of days at Cliff Cottage and he readily consented to do so.

The truth was Ethel wished to hear from her lover, and she knew, if her brother escaped he would come at once home, so she would not leave.

Captain Hudson found in the judge a boyhood friend, and they had not met for forty years, so the two got along famously together, and more and more charmed with Ethel Judge Brentford was persuaded to remain a week at the cottage.

But business called him home then, and Estelle went with him, Ethel promising to send for her if she needed her, or to come to her if she could do so soon.

And so Ethel and Uncle Hudson were again alone.

But hardly had the carriage of Judge Brentford rolled out of sight on its way to Boston, when a visitor arrived at the cottage.

It was Rupert Vail, and he asked to see Ethel at once on most important business.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE TWO CAPTAINS.

THE Blackbird set sail from Boston without a light visible upon her decks.

As she was known to be ready to sail, when she slipped by the fort, she was simply hailed, and answered promptly, so was not brought to. Once out at sea, with Boston Light astern, Mark Monte went into the cabin to read his "sealed instructions" and know which course he was to pursue.

He found there a young man in the uniform of a captain, seated at a table, a letter with broken seal in his hand.

He had been told that his first luff was indisposed and in the cabin, so thought nothing of it.

And the one he found there was Burt Brentford.

That young man having received his orders from Justin Laws, in his disguise, was waiting until the schooner got to sea to carry them out.

He had, when the schooner was fairly under way, come out of a state-room, took out of his pocket a sealed letter and sat down to read it.

That letter contained his "sealed instructions."

His face changed color as he read it, and it was evident that he was deeply moved.

What he read was as follows:

"CAPTAIN BURT BRENTFORD. Schooner Blackbird:—
"SIR:—The vessel of which you are to assume command, after reading this letter, was fitted out for a purpose which was partially made known to you while you lay in your cell in prison awaiting the day when you were to be strangled to death upon the gallows.

"The motive of the writer, and who is owner of the schooner, for saving you from a felon's fate you need not know; but having saved you, I now place under your command this fine vessel, fleet as the wind and fully armed, manned and equipped.

"You have been a sailor, begun as a yachtsman I learn, and rumor has it that in your wanderings to avoid justice for a murder committed, you were a pirate.

"I care nothing for your antecedents, but having saved your neck from the hangman's rope and given you the means of earning your fortune, I shall expect that you serve me faithfully, as I believe that you will do.

"I desire money, and the way to get it is by overhauling richly freighted vessels and getting booty.

"With this fleet vessel you can readily do that.

"One-half of your gains I am to have.

"The other half to go for repairs on your vessel, to yourself and your crew, and you should certainly get rich.

"I furnish the means entire and you do the work, and your neck gets stretched if taken.

"I hope you fully understand me, for I wish to make myself plain and have no mistake.

"When you have a cargo of booty you are to communicate with the landlord of the Star Inn and he will send a vessel out after your booty and dispose of it.

"He will appraise it as it is transferred, and pay you your share, while my share he will hold for me when the booty is sold.

"You can readily get word to Landlord Hopper Hayes, Star Inn, by sending a trusty man ashore, or a letter by a coaster.

"Having settled the financial matter of your going in the schooner, let me now refer to a little affair of revenge which I wish consummated.

"There is a foe that I wish removed from my path forever.

"Why, it does not matter to you; but he must be removed.

"To entrap him, I have led him to believe he was to command this vessel, he not knowing me as the owner.

"I gave him to understand that he was to go on a special cruise, and with the permission of the Government, and that he would read his instructions when he got out to sea and left Boston Light dead astern.

"Your instructions are, to await his coming into the cabin and arrest him, when he has read his instructions.

"You are to put him in irons, but to take him on deck, seemingly a free man, that he may be seen

there by the crews of vessels you rob and be believed the commander of the Blackbird.

"If he should be killed, well and good, and you are to so report.

"If not, then you are to have him executed as a mutineer and send proof of his death in when you meet Landlord Hopper Hayes or his agent.

"This man, who is to be my victim, through you, bears the name of Mark Monte.

"That name you are to take, and under it commit your piracies.

"You are to be known as Mark Monte, the Mutineer Marauder.

"To get this vessel in perfect trim, I gained a permit from the Government to arm and equip her as a pirate-hunter.

"With her setting sail from Boston the rumor goes abroad that Mark Monte cut her out from her anchorage and turned her into a pirate.

"I hope you understand fully, and, should a cruiser capture you, you can state you retook the craft from the Mutineer Marauder, thus saving your neck.

"Serve me well, and you will enrich yourself; but betray me, and you will be delivered up to the hangman of the Boston jail, for, unknown to you as I am, my eyes will be continually upon you.

"Remember not to fail me in one of my commands.

"Communicate with me, if necessary, through the agent before named.

"Your secret commander,

"UNKNOWN."

Such was the letter which Burt Brentford, the escaped prisoner, read.

And he read it several times over, so as to impress it thoroughly upon his memory.

"Now was the man who first played the part of a priest, the man who I am sure wore a disguise to-night, when bringing me on board this vessel, one and the same?

"I believe that he is; and more, that he is a tool in some one else's hands.

"But who's?

"Who is it that has sought to aid me, and was it that I might be true to his interests, the motive, as he says in this letter?

"I understood that I was to be a pirate, and share with him the result of my piracies before I left the jail.

"But there is a motive beyond all this that I cannot fathom.

"Now to take up the part I am to play against this victim of his—Mark Monte—who believes himself commander of this craft, and has been entrapped for revenge alone."

He had spoken the words thoughtfully, in a low voice, as though weighing each one.

Then he relapsed into silence, and was a long time lost in what appeared to be deep and painful reverie.

He glanced several times at the handsome uniform he had been told by the one who brought him on board that he would find in his state-room, and one observing him, as he sat there, would have surmised that there was a little struggle going on in his heart.

In the midst of his reveries he felt by the movements of the schooner that she was riding the ocean swells; and he set his lips firmly to meet the ordeal through which he must pass.

Another moment and Mark Monte entered the cabin, and the two captains were face to face.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE TRAP SPRUNG.

BURT BRENTFORD eyed his temporary captain with a peculiar look, when he entered the cabin.

He beheld a man his junior in years, but one whose face was stern though kindly, and who looked every inch a sailor.

Tall, splendidly formed, handsome, and with every feature stamped with resolution and courage. Burt Brentford read Mark Monte aright—a friend true as steel, a foe to be dreaded, a man to do no mean action.

As he arose to his feet upon the entrance of Mark Monte, the latter saw before him in Burt Brentford a fine specimen of manhood.

There was a look of recklessness combined with a cynical look that slightly marred the handsome face; but he did not look the one to do a mean act, but one to seek as a friend.

That he stood in the presence of a man who had just escaped the gallows, Mark Monte had not the remotest idea.

Having been told that the first officer was below, and indisposed, he now stepped toward him and said:

"I am Captain Mark Monte, and you are my first officer, I suppose?"

"I regret to hear of your being indisposed."

The words were kindly said, the manner courteous, and Mark Monte extended his

hand, which Burt Brentford took, while he said:

"Yes, sir; I am the first officer of this schooner, and I have just finished reading my instructions."

"Will you be good enough, sir, to look over those given to you to read when the Blackbird left Boston Light astern, and we will understand each other better."

There was something odd in the words, but Mark Monte simply bowed, and sitting down by the table broke the seal of his "Instructions," which Justin Laws, in his disguise, had given him.

The paper was dated at Boston, on the day before, and was as follows:

"MARK MONTE:—

"Sir:—You have been given temporary command of the cruiser Blackbird, for a special purpose which I will now make known to you.

"You happen to be in the way of certain persons, and so it has been decided to remove you.

"What the motives are that prompt your enemies matters not, but you are to be sacrificed from a feeling of revenge, and the following is to be your fate:

"This vessel goes out of the harbor of Boston to-night, leaving behind her the report that you cut her out from her anchorage and turned her into a pirate craft.

"This will damn you eternally and place a halter around your neck, for you will be at once branded as a buccaneer.

"When you read these lines you will be at sea, and will have left Boston Light astern.

"You will have the idea that the vessel and crew are under your command.

"You are vastly wrong in that thought.

"You are only the temporary commander until the vessel gets to sea, and then, if you are wise, you will turn over the command without trouble to the one who serves temporarily as your first officer.

"That one is a fugitive from justice, and the hangman had his grip upon him when he escaped, so you see how ready he will be to turn pirate.

"By so doing he can place himself in no greater danger than he is at present, and at the same time can win a fortune by piracies.

"So you see you have to deal with a desperate man.

"And more, the crew have all been shipped with the idea of a lawless crew, and they know that you are not to be their commander.

"The officer into whose hands I commit the vessel and her destinies, will drop his own name and use yours.

"That is, he will be known as Mark Monte the Mutineer Marauder, for it will be reported that you seized the vessel and made a buccaneer of her.

"You will be seen by the crews of vessels the Blackbird overhauls, upon the decks, and so that will be proof positive that you have run up the black flag, and more, you will be supposed to be the captain.

"Now, do you grasp my idea?

"If you should be killed in action, the better for you; but if not you will be hanged as a pirate some day.

"Now you know the trap into which you have placed yourself, and your orders are to submit at once to the command of your superior officer—known as 'Captain Monte.'

"I leave you in his hands.

"Your enemy,

"UNKNOWN."

Burt Brentford sat in the shadow gazing upon the face of Mark Monte as he read the strange words written to him.

The lamp revealed every feature of the face perfectly; but Burt Brentford had to admit to himself that he saw not a change of expression, not a shadow of fear or even surprise.

He knew, too, about what Mark Monte was reading, and he muttered to himself:

"He's a cool one and no mistake."

When Mark Monte had read the communication to the end, his eyes lingered upon the signature, "Unknown."

Then he turned it over and looked at the address:

"TO CAPTAIN MARK MONTE.

"Commanding Armed Schooner Blackbird,

"At Sea off Boston Light."

Without a glance at Brentford, he settled himself more comfortably in his chair and began to reread the communication.

Burt Brentford did not move, nor did he take his eyes off that handsome, impassible face.

To the end Mark Monte read the strange letter once more, and then he folded it up and placed it upon the table.

The silence between the two was impressive, and between men of less iron nerves would have been appalling.

At last the silence was broken, and by Mark Monte, who asked quietly:

"Are you the person referred to in this communication, sir, may I ask?"

"I have not read it, sir, but by what name am I referred to in the letter?"

"No name is mentioned, sir, but you are spoken of as a fugitive from the gallows."

"That part is true, for I am an escaped convict," and the words were uttered in a tone full of bitterness.

"Ah, indeed! you do not look it, sir, for I should never have selected you as other than a man of noble nature, courage and kind heart.

"Your face belies you, or you are falsely accused."

Burt Brentford started, and half-rose from his chair.

But he changed his mind, whatever the impulse had been, and dropping back into his seat, said, indifferently:

"A man's face is not always the index to his character, sir; but may I ask you to exchange letters with me, for mine may interest you, as yours will me, and it is better for both of us that we understand the situation fully."

"With pleasure, sir," and Mark Monte handed over his letter.

He did not rise, so Burt Brentford had to do so, and he gave to Mark Monte his own communication to read.

Ere he looked at the one handed to him, Burt Brentford watched the face of the man before him to see him start when he read his name and learned who he was.

But there was no start—Mark Monte's face was as unmoved as before, but looking up, he said quietly:

"Are you Burt Brentford, who was to have been hanged ten days from to-day?"

"I am, sir."

"I congratulate you upon your escape, sir," and Mark Monte resumed his reading, while Burt Brentford muttered:

"That man is a marvel!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE BLACKBIRD'S CAPTAIN.

MARK MONTE read the communication written to Burt Brentford through to the end without a change of expression.

He still sat where the lamplight fell full upon him, and as Brentford often glanced up from reading the letter to Mark Monte, he could see the latter's face distinctly.

Then, when both had finished reading, again fell an appalling silence between the two.

But it was broken as before by Mark Monte, who asked:

"Will you inform me, Mr. Brentford, if these documents tell the truth?"

"In what respect, sir?"

"As to who is to command this schooner, and the motive of her cruise?"

"They mean all they say, sir."

"That you are to command, and that I am to be arrested?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the schooner is to be made a pirate?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Brentford, I am not one to shrink from duty, if death follow close on the heels of my act, sir, and I shall not make an exception in this case.

"This schooner was fitted out and armed for a lawless purpose, but, believing her to be an honest craft, bound on an honest cruise, I took command of her, and the only thing that can deprive me of my command is death.

"I am captain here, and I shall defend my rights with my life, and, as my country sadly needs good vessels, I shall cruise against her foes, in the war now breaking out, and not allow a black flag to cast its shadow upon my deck while I have the power to prevent.

"To you, sir, I offer the position of first lieutenant on board the Blackbird, as a privateer in honorable warfare, and for your own sake I hope that you will accept it and by your career rub from your name the dishonor now upon it, since I cannot but feel you have reasons to extenuate your act, which if known would have proven you less guilty."

Mark Monte had spoken calmly, and without the slightest show that he was in any danger himself.

He had made up his mind to his course, and death should alone prevent him from doing as he intended.

Burt Brentford gazed at him with a strange expression upon his face.

He saw a man at bay who knew not what fear was.

He saw that Mark Monte meant to be master or lose his life in the attempt to be.

Before him flashed many thoughts of the past, and his good resolutions for the future. He recalled the lovely face of his deserted wife, and her pleading.

The little boy she had named after him, his son, came before him pleading for him to do his duty.

His sister's beautiful face, the sister whom he had so dearly loved, seemed to be looking into his own, and he remembered her words of how she trusted him and did not believe him so guilty as he had been proven.

Then his father's stern face rose before him.

That father who had made him his idol, who had condoned his petty faults, and had paid his debts without a murmur until he had outlawed himself by what was said to have been a cruel murder of an officer of the law, who was doing his duty by arresting him for his crime of forgery.

He had forged his father's name, but the officer had brought his death upon himself by his own acts.

But the two crimes had made him a fugitive, and the stern old judge had not known his own son where duty called him to obey its dictates, and so the returned son had been arrested, tried and convicted.

All these thoughts flashed through his mind, and then came the thought of his rescue, not from a feeling of humanity, but for gain.

He had been saved from the gallows, and was to but serve a master by a lawless life.

He was to commit crime, in return for his rescue, and he was to drag down an innocent man to ruin, to stain his name with infamy.

Such were the terms offered him, and such were the terms upon which he had gained his freedom from death at the hands of the hangman.

It is true he had intended to obey in his own way, yet he had meant to serve himself as well as his master. Now the man whom he was to command had proclaimed himself the master.

He had defied the orders of the Unknown, he had said he would defy the crew.

And more, he had offered him a chance to redeem his name from dishonor.

It was true there was a path of honor open to him under Mark Monte's command.

The unknown owner of the schooner deserved to forfeit his vessel for sending her forth to serve under a pirate flag.

And the man who confronted him had not risen in anger at the part to be played against him.

He had not denounced him for the trap he had placed for him.

He had boldly averred his intention of doing his duty, and he had spoken in kindness to him, had said he believed him not so guilty as his accusers had said, and had offered him a path of honor to follow under his lead.

Was this the man whom a cruel revenge of an unknown master was to drag down to ruin?

And this Mark Monte, too, was the man who had a few days before saved the life of his loved sister Estelle.

She had told her story of how the stranger had sprung into the waters to her rescue, and had saved her, clinging to her when death was dragging him down, and saving her in the end.

She had told him the name of her preserver, and he recalled him as a fellow-unfortunate, for he had read in prison of the trial of Mark Monte for mutiny and his acquittal.

Had Mark Monte acted differently from what he had, he might have found, on the spur of the moment, a dangerous man in Burt Brentford.

But, acting as he had done, he mastered the man and the situation.

"I await, sir, your decision.

"Is it to be war between us, or friendship?"

The question was asked with almost seeming indifference as to which it would be.

Then came the answer, low-toned, firm, and in earnest:

"Captain Monte, to say that I do not know you well would be false.

"I do know you, and while in prison I read the persecution you were under, and you had my sympathy, for I was not in-

tentionally a murderer, though I admit having forged my father's name to save me from ruin, and hoping and expecting to return the sum before due.

"Now, sir, I know what I owe you as the rescuer of my sister from death.

"I accepted the terms in that letter to gain my pardon, and I expected to carry them out; but I did not know you to be who you are when I entered into the plot against you.

"You are a remarkable man, Captain Monte, and though on board this craft, it would be madness for you to attempt to fight against the fate intended for you, I tell you frankly I feel that you would die in doing your duty.

"Your kind words to me, sir, arouse my ambition, and you offer me your friendship.

"I told my wife—for I confess to you I am secretly married, that I would turn out all right some day, and I pledged my sister that one day she should not be ashamed of me.

"I had in my mind then the winning of honor by turning this vessel into a privateer.

"Captain Monte, I accept your offer, sir, and acknowledge you as commander of this schooner, to guide her destinies and my own.

"There is my hand upon it, and woe be to the man that disputes your leadership!"

He held forth his hand, and it was grasped warmly by Mark Monte, just as the cry came from the deck:

"Sail ho, sir, and a cruiser!"

CHAPTER XLVIII:

AN UNEXPECTED ALLY.

"COME, Captain Monte, we will go on deck together.

"What the men expect I do not know, nor what the other officers have been told by our Unknown; but you are captain, and I second you in what you do, sir," said Burt Brentford.

Mark Monte hesitated an instant, and then replied:

"With you my ally, Lieutenant Brentford, I shall not fear the result.

"Come!"

They went on deck together, and Mark Monte at once called out to an officer to point out the sail.

"It is yonder, sir, abeam, coming before the wind and her rig shows the cruiser."

"Ay, ay! and she looks English and is too heavy by far for us.

"Let her fall off, helmsman, and Lieutenant Brentford, set all the canvas she will stand in this rough sea."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the young officer promptly obeyed, and the schooner went flying away from the large cruiser.

Hardly had she changed her course when more sail was set on the large vessel and a red flame flashed from her bows.

"Hal that is for us to come to.

"She may be American, and may be English.

"We will run for it until we know," and Mark Monte watched the behavior of his vessel.

The stranger had the advantage of him, as the sea was very rough and did not buffet the heavier hull as it did the lighter one; but it could be seen that the schooner gained very slowly, if any.

The stranger, finding his shot unheeded, opened a rapid fire, and the balls flew thick and fast about the schooner, yet did no damage, fortunately.

Mark Monte soon discovered that his officers and men seemed in utter ignorance of what the Unknown had intended with regard to himself, but they, without doubt, felt that they had been shipped for a lawless cruise.

Those of them who supposed they could do as they pleased were but a very short while in making the discovery that their captain meant to be master, and was ably seconded by his first luff.

That their commander was every inch a sailor, they realized at once, and there was a ring in his voice that was dangerous if aroused.

He remained on deck all night, closely watching every movement of his vessel, and at times taking the helm himself, as though to feel her best points.

When dawn broke, he glanced back at the cruiser, which was now just beyond range, and said quietly:

"We have gained just one mile on her, and the sea is growing wilder, so we will barely hold our own.

"Fire a gun of defiance, Mr. Brentford, and run up the American flag, for I am sure yonder fellow is an Englishman."

The order was promptly obeyed, and in answer the cruiser wore round and let fly a broadside, while the English flag rose to her peak.

"Ah! as I thought and he has declared war.

"Now to escape him, for he has four guns and men to one."

On through the day the schooner sped, the cruiser gaining slightly in the very heavy seas, for she was a remarkable fast craft, and at nightfall she was within range.

During the night not a light was set upon the schooner, and Mark Monte tried to dodge the Englishman.

But the cruiser also showed no lights, and when dawn came was still in range.

"They have sharp eyes aboard that craft and have watched our every move," said Burt Brentford.

The day passed as the night had, and thus went by forty-eight hours with the fleet and persistent Englishman hanging on the wake of the Blackbird like a bloodhound.

When a long way off from the land, Mark Monte determined to double over night upon his tireless pursuer and run back to seek a hiding-place inshore, should he still pursue.

He was successful in throwing him off for several hours, and had gotten well headed back for the land when dawn broke to find the Englishman a league to windward and hove to.

But the schooner was sighted quickly and the chase begun anew.

At last, after one week had passed the schooner was within a few leagues of land, and Mark Monte knew the dawn would reveal the high and rugged hills of Montauk Point.

He had believed his pursuer thrown off his track at last, for she could not be seen in the hazy atmosphere, and had allowed his hard-worked crew to seek what rest they could.

But, just as dawn broke there came a red flash, another and another and so on until a broadside of guns had been fired, and out of the haze came the hurtling iron shower.

It was from the Englishman and he was not a mile astern.

The shots told too, some of them, for several men went down, and a gun was crippled.

"To your quarters!" rung out Mark Monte's voice, and the crew rushed to obey.

Then the schooner's guns responded to the fire of the Englishman, and every shot told.

At once it became a running fight, with the schooner hastening to round Montauk Point.

But her adversary was untiring and relentless, and her guns found a savage fire upon the Blackbird.

Mark Monte handled his vessel with a skill that won the admiration of his crew.

He was cool, fearless and skillful.

He knew that the odds were against him terribly: but he meant to fight to the bitter end and punish his huge adversary all in his power.

He was glad to see that he could trust both officers and crew, and Burt Brentford was a tower of strength to him.

The schooner was crippled but continued her fight and fight.

Two of her guns were dismounted, her main-topmast was shot away, and a dozen of her crew had fallen, but she had hit back hard and all knew that the owner would have nothing to crow over if she captured them, and which Mark Monte vowed should be only when further resistance would be madness.

The large cruiser, as though furious with her prey for giving her such a long chase, fired savagely, and Mark Monte began to feel that escape was out of the question, and it was only to do his foe all the damage possible before he struck his flag that he kept up the fight.

At the same time he wanted to round Montauk Point and escape in his boats, setting his vessel on fire.

He had just given his command to his officers, to prepare the boats and put in them what provisions and things that could be

taken, when out from behind Montauk Point shot a vessel into view.

All eyes fell upon it, and as it headed boldly toward them, the crew of the schooner gave a ringing cheer.

It was a brig, and she sailed like a witch.

But, as she came on she was seen to be getting her canvas into fighting trim, and her men were observed going to quarters.

She certainly was a very beautiful vessel and carried a large armament, and full crew.

Was she friend or foe was the question that now arose, for she showed no colors.

But a moment after she luffed and sent a broadside at the Englishman, while the Stars and Stripes went up to her peak, and to the fore a flag, the private colors of her commander.

That she was an ally of the schooner there was no longer doubt.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

THE fire of the stranger upon the English cruiser was a severe one, for the effect was readily discerned from the deck of the schooner.

The brig was hardly much stronger, in guns and men, than was the schooner, but for all that she rushed down to the aid of the Blackbird, though her commander could not but know that the Englishman was far stronger than the two American vessels together.

But he came on with a vengeance, pouring in his shot and maneuvering his vessel with great skill, while he headed so as to get a raking fire at the cruiser.

Every shot seemed to tell, and the punishment the large vessel was receiving was readily visible from the schooner.

Mark Monte was not a man to let another fight his battles for him, and he at once ceased his flight and nerved for close action.

"By Neptune! but that brig is handled splendidly, yet I fear together even we can do nothing against the cruiser," Burt Brentford said.

But, as though in contradiction of his words, the brig's broadside cut away the bowsprit and foremast of the cruiser, and she came to suddenly.

But her crew were game, and kept her guns roaring as she did so.

The cheers from the brig were answered by the crew of the schooner, and Mark Monte's guns were fired rapidly and with deadly aim.

As the cruiser was lying to, the brig and schooner held the advantage in getting into position, and right well did they use it, until it began to look as though the Englishman had caught a pair of Tartars.

As they neared the cruiser, each pouring in a terrific fire, they saw that the English vessel was suffering greatly, though she still fought on.

The British captain felt that he could have beaten off, or even whipped half a dozen such craft, had they not been handled as those two were, and he said to an officer:

"If we are whipped, pluck and skill will do it, for we are far the stronger."

But the brig and schooner were not to be beaten off, and as they neared the cruiser, as though to board, one on her starboard quarter, the other forward of amidships on her port side, the English captain felt that the chances had come down to not being even equal.

Another five minutes passed, and with her captain fallen and her deck strewn with dead and dying, the English vessel was forced to strike.

"Cease firing!" cried a voice on board.

"Do you surrender?" came from the brig.

"Ay, ay!"

"Then haul down your flag!"

The order was slowly obeyed and a moment after the brig ranged up alongside, followed by the schooner.

"You are Captain Mark Monte, sir?" and a tall, handsome man advanced toward the commander of the Blackbird.

"I am, sir, and you—"

"I am Malcolm Meredith, sir."

The two men had met before, but it was when Mark Monte was in prison, and Malcolm Meredith had visited him in disguise.

Instantly Monte held forth his hand and said:

"You place another great debt of grati-

tude upon me, Captain Meredith, for we would have been this vessel's prize but for your pluck and skill."

"Thank you, and am glad to have served you, for I saw your danger, but felt we could beat the British vessel off, if not whip him."

"I was in search of you, Captain Monte; but we'll talk over matters when you have secured your prize."

"My prize? My dear sir, it is yours."

"Well, we will share it and the honor, and I will take the vessel to Boston, for I have a motive in doing so."

"And you were in search of me?"

"Yes, but not now can I tell you why."

They went together then and accepted the surrender of the Englishman, who, a splendid sailor, could not but compliment them upon their work having been so well done.

After all was ready for sailing, Mark Monte went into the cabin of the brig, and Malcolm Meredith told him how he had been in Boston in disguise, and heard of his having been branded with cutting out the Blackbird to turn her into a pirate.

"I knew it was false, so followed you to see if you had not been entrapped by your old foe, Ezra Vail, for he is such to you, in spite of all his professions to the contrary."

Mark Monte then sent for Burt Brentford, and told Malcolm Meredith his story, and concluded by saying:

"Now I intend to turn privateer and win a commission from the Government, though at first I suppose we will be branded as buccaneers."

"But you also have suffered, Captain Meredith."

"I have, indeed, and I am no more a rover than are you, and when next we meet I will explain to you a secret, but now I cannot make it known."

"I will, however, go to Salem and see your sister, and tell her not to doubt you under any circumstances, while you go on with your good work of making a name for your vessel and yourself—a name that will gain a pardon for Lieutenant Brentford, and commissions for yourself and your officers."

"You are a noble friend, Captain Meredith, and I will do as you say in all things; but I assure you I feared it would be hard to remove the brand of infamy from me which some enemy has put upon me."

"That enemy I will track down for you, as my brig needs repairs, and I will go into Boston and report to the commandant."

"Will you dare to do so?"

"Oh, yes, for I can tell him a story that will prove me guiltless."

"Now, can I lend you any aid from my vessel or the English cruiser to repair damages, for you know I sail for port with our prize."

Mark Monte accepted certain needed aid, and a score of good men from the crew of the brig, while his wounded were sent to port with Malcolm Meredith.

Then the three vessels swung apart, and while the schooner hunted a secluded harbor on the Long Island Coast, to repair damages, the brig set sail with the English cruiser as a prize.

Having run into Boston Harbor with his own vessel disguised and his prize following, Malcolm Meredith at once sought the port-commandant and for a long time the two were closeted together.

At last Malcolm Meredith returned to his vessel, gave certain orders to his first luff, and then departed for Salem in a small fishing-smack.

His visit to Cliff Cottage and his words to Ethel Monte regarding her brother are already known.

But the Red Dove and her midnight robbery of Ezra Vail, and the flight to sea pursued by the Sea Sentinel.

Another chapter must explain that mystery to my kind reader.

CHAPTER L.

THE PIRATE'S DOUBLE.

ETHEL MONTE sat in her little parlor one evening some two weeks after the departure of Estelle Brentford, and a knock at the door startled her.

Opening it she beheld a man whose appearance indicated old age, for he had a gray beard and long white hair.

Seeing that she was alone the visitor raised himself from his bent attitude, and removing

a wig and false beard stood revealed as Malcolm Meredith.

A startled cry broke from Ethel's lips as she recognized her lover, but he said quickly:

"Do not be alarmed, Ethel, for I am not the man I am painted, and I came here to explain all, and to tell you that you no longer need fear for your noble brother."

"Let me begin my story by telling you that some weeks ago I ran across a craft strangely like my own."

"A suspicion was in my mind as to what she was, and I signaled her; but she opened fire upon me, and I was compelled to hit back."

"We had a desperate battle, which ended in my capture of the vessel."

"That craft fought under a blue flag with a red dove in the center, and gold wings in the corners."

"I fought under a blue flag with a gray dove in the center, and silver wings in the corners."

"The captain of that vessel was mortally wounded, and I visited him in his cabin."

"Then I knew and understood all, Ethel."

"I knew that our mother had had twin boys, but I supposed my brother to be dead."

"One of us was named Malcolm, the other Mark, and I was stolen by my nurse, who pretended to my father, Captain Mountjoy, that I was dead."

"My brother was adopted by a friend of my father, but one whom he left to look after him kidnapped him and raised him on an island on the coast of Maine."

"On that island the sailor, who kidnapped my brother Mark, had been wrecked with my father, and a treasure was buried there."

"Into my brother's ears was poured a tale of sorrow, of how our mother had been shot by pirates who sought our father's life, and he had been hanged as a pirate when he was as innocent of the charge as a child."

"But Ezra Vail was at the bottom of it all, and so my brother was brought up to hate and revenge."

"He cruised about the world, after the death of the old sailor, and at last began his career of revenge."

"Strange to say, the same builder built a vessel for him that I got my brig from, and by a coincidence we both adopted for a flag a design pricked into our arms as baby boys by an old seaman—alike, save a gray dove in mine, and silver wings, where his was a red dove and wings of gold."

"I see that you begin to understand me, Ethel, but I have more to tell."

"It was my brother who struck those blows at Ezra Vail and became the whalers' Nemesis, and he it was who has been the lawless rover."

"He it was who robbed the office of Ezra Vail, and got with the gold some valuable papers, which are now in my possession and concern you and your brother."

"You remember that three men disappeared mysteriously from Salem a short while ago."

"They were Ezra Vail, Rupert Vail and Justin Laws."

"The two former were killed in my action with my brother's vessel, but the latter is my prisoner, and for his confessions he shall go free."

"My brother intended to execute Ezra Vail, for he it was who hanged our father, or urged the mob to do so, and sought revenge because father had been his rival in love, for the hand of your mother, Ethel."

"My mother?"

"Yes, the sister of the one you deemed your mother, but who brought you and Mark up as her children."

"But at her death your mother gave you both to her sister, Mrs. Roland Monte, but she left an enormous fortune, and of this she made you two co-heirs."

"A fortune?"

"Yes. All this these papers found in Ezra Vail's iron safe make known. He sought to destroy your brother and have Rupert marry you, so as to get all of the inheritance."

"This Justin Laws shall tell you before he departs for other lands, for he shall go."

"Now to your brother, and the charges against him."

"Justin Laws has confessed all, and how he, for Ezra Vail, worked a most damnable plot to destroy him."

"But it failed, for the man they set to do the work was Burt Brentford, and he is today your brother's lieutenant on the Blackbird, privateer."

Then, to the amazed and delighted girl, Mark Mountjoy, for such was his name, told the story of the flight of the Blackbird and the plot against Mark Monte, and what followed.

He told of the death of his brother from his wound received in action, and how he had left him his brig and the treasure on the island on the coast of Maine.

Then he made known how he had visited the commandant at Boston and surrendered the brig Red Dove, telling him all, and proving his own innocence, while he received a commission as privateersman in the United States service.

The aid he had rendered Mark Monte on the schooner he spoke most modestly of, and he had told to the proper officials the plot of Ezra Vail, and how it had failed through the noble nature of Burt Brentford.

"Now, Ethel," continued Captain Mountjoy, "I came in disguise to see you, for they still deem me a *pirate* here; but I will return here in a few days in my brig, and the commandant is to be my guest, so as to stamp the charges against me of piracy as false."

"A slaver I must confess I was for a while, but my honor rebelled at that heinous traffic in human beings, and I gave it up."

"Now I am to cruise the seas as a privateersman, and as my double, my poor brother Malcolm, is dead, I will no longer be called a buccaneer."

"When a pardon is obtained for Brentford, Mark will come into this port with his vessel, for a commission for him has been sent for also, and the good people of Salem will have no cause to be ashamed of their two privateer craft, I assure you."

Such was the story of Mark Mountjoy, who had been a pirate's double.

CONCLUSION.

Captain Mountjoy kept his word and sailed into Salem Harbor with the Boston port-commandant as his guest, and the story becoming known of how he had been wronged, he was regarded as a hero.

And, a few months after Mark Monte ran in with the Blackbird. Judge Brentford was there to greet his son and hand him a pardon, for his gallant services.

Then came the confession of the young sailor of his marriage to pretty Beatrice and the regard that his father would give his wife and little son a warm place in his heart.

As a proof that he would do so, the judge and Estelle drove to the home of Burt Brentford's wife, as soon as the Blackbird had sailed again to win new honors, and Ethel accompanied them.

So to the elegant mansion went Beatrice and her boy to make it their home, and the judge often said that he did not wonder that his son had fallen in love with the beautiful woman, if she was half as lovely as a girl as she was as a wife and mother.

With the papers in his possession, Judge Brentford found no difficulty in securing for Mark Monte and his sister their large fortune in trust at the bank, and anxious to leave a place where she had known so much of sorrow, Ethel gave to old Captain Hudson pretty Cliff Cottage and purchased a lordly home in Boston near the Brentford mansion.

Through the influence of Judge Brentford, a pardon was obtained for Sam Slick, and that worthy hied him away to other scenes to enjoy the money he had received for aiding Burt Brentford to escape.

Justin Laws, after having made full confession, took a sudden departure from Salem, and his wife did not accompany him.

As he took all his money with him, his wife went to keeping a boarding-house again and was known as the "Widow Laws."

Of the fate of Ezra Vail and his son no one seemed to ever know, other than the few to whom Mark Mountjoy had told the story of their death in his brother's brig.

Their fortune went to the State as no heirs were found to claim it.

When the war of 1812 came to a close the names of Mark Monte and Mark Mountjoy stood out in bold relief as most daring privateersmen, and their officers and crews were heroes with them.

Though Estelle and Ethel had received

scores of brilliant offers, neither had room in their hearts for other than the two gallant sailors they loved so truly, Mark Monte and Mark Mountjoy, once known as the Mutineer Marauder and the other as the Pirate's Double.

THE END.

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